Signs, Symbols, and Hieroglyphs of Ancient Veracruz: Classic to Postclassic Transition

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SIGNS, SYMBOLS, AND HIEROGLYPHS OF ANCIENT VERACRUZ

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

SIGNS, SYMBOLS, AND HIEROGLYPHS OF ANCIENT VERACRUZ

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After the fall of Classic cities, between the years C.E. 700-1000, new symbolic vocabularies spread throughout Mesoamerica. Shifting conventions in hieroglyphic writing reflect a changing cultural paradigm where previous notions of time, political authority, and visual communications are radically overhauled. In ancient Veracruz the nature of text and image reflects this new wave in semiotic language.

This dissertation documents and analyzes hieroglyphic scripts in the Gulf Coast lowlands during the Classic-Postclassic transition, using a cognitive-structural analysis of signs, symbols, and hieroglyphs. Using the joint venues of time and space, the author identifies the developmental trajectories of Veracruz hieroglyphic writing and symbolism. Diagnostic attributes surveyed within this study include conventions used in personal names and calendric signs, toponyms, linear text, affixes, substitutions, orientation and directionality, as well as adjoining iconographic programs. On these bases the author identifies the nature and function of discrete writing systems extant in Veracruz during the Late Classic period. A corpus of Veracruz-related hieroglyphs and inscriptions accompanies these analyses, cataloguing the dissemination of hieroglyphic writing beyond the Veracruz-Tabasco coastal plain.

Between C.E. 700 and 1000 narrative, interactive scenes on architectural sculpture and ceramics replace earlier carved stone stelae depicting the exploits of individual rulers, with linear history and time keeping giving way to ceremonials acts regenerated through the repetition of temporal cycles. In southern Veracruz the Long

Count, fixing events within a precise locus in sequential time, discontinues in favor of shorthand dates, more ambiguous to 21st Century scholars. In particular, pictorial chronicles on Fine Paste, Molded-carved ceramics from the Mixtequilla illustrate stories connected with an emerging class of merchant elite.

Germane to this study is the distribution of square cartouche-enclosed day signs, the most salient feature in the Mixe-Zoquean derivation script of southern Veracruz. Single or paired calendric signs adorn relief carvings of architectural features, monumental sculpture, ballgame paraphernalia, and Fine Paste Molded-carved ceramics. By the Terminal Classic Period (830-1000) square-cartouche day signs appear from north-central Veracruz into the Maya lowlands as far south as El Salvador. We find their presence in concert with increased popularity of the rubber ballgame and ballgame ritual, merchant iconography, and the appearance of Fine Paste Molded-carved ceramics. These items link Veracruz archaeology and trade with unexplained "foreign" traits among the Terminal Classic Maya. Veracruz long-distance merchants hold a key role in spreading new technologies, symbolism, and religious practices, and in doing so reshape the nature of Mesoamerican thought and culture.

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With love to my father

Robert H. Wyllie, Ph.D.

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Prologue

I originally intended to write on Central Mexican codices, and would have, had it not been for a certain ceramic vessel in the Museo Amparo, in Puebla, Mexico.

The shallow bowl occupied a center display case in a gallery of artifacts from Mexico's Gulf Coast. Labeled *EL TAJIN,* the identification seemed credible. Low relief carving adorned the surface of the wide-flaring bowl in a manner Tatiana Proskouriakoff first called "Classic Veracruz Style". The salient features of the style are double outlines and a complex weave of interlocking scrolls.

A sparsely-clad figure reclined within the decorative maze of scrollwork. His posture, proportions, and costume elements conformed to artistic canons for depicting El Tajin figures as defined by Michael Kampen in his book *The Sculptures of El Tajin, Veracruz, Mexico*

In contrast with the lavish ornamental costumes of Classic Maya lords, El Tajin rulers did not wear their symbols of status "on their sleeves" so to speak. Regalia is understated, less ostentatious. In the case of Veracruz, artists reserve the *horror vacuui* of curvilinear detail for background, and on the Amparo Museum bowl the recumbent protagonist, propped up on his one elbow, seemed to lounge languidly amid the busy visual cacophony of stylized dragons and framing devices. Stylistically, at least, I could imagine that this was an El Tajin bowl.

The trouble was this: I knew of no such ceramic type from Tajin. Some years earlier I had written a Senior Undergraduate Thesis on El Tajin and Classic Veracruz art, and felt that at the very least I knew the overall sequence of artifacts from that site. Granted, in the interim, Mexican archaeologist Juegen Bruggemann, with vast amounts of

PEMEX money, conducted large-scale excavations at Tajin. And there was another problem: the hieroglyphs.

The lounging lord, atalat'l in hand, his complex intertwining world, was framed from above by a horizontal band of enigmatic hieroglyphs encased in a double outline. Two vertical glyphic columns flanked him on either side. The format mimicked the P.S.S. (Primary Standard Sequence) and S.S.S. (Secondary Standard Sequence) found on Maya ceramics. Yet, these were clearly *not* Maya hieroglyphs, and to my knowledge a form of writing *sui generis*.

El Tajin had no tradition of sequential hieroglyphic texts. What hieroglyphs existed were principally calendric names labeling characters in the pictorial narrative of architectural reliefs. During the 1930's archaeologist Wilfredo Du Solier reported finding "hundreds" of blackware sherds from what he called "captive taking vessels" containing hieroglyphs naming 13 Rabbit, an important Tajin ruler. 13 Rabbit glyphs are associated with the Mound of the Building Columns, a palace complex on an acropolis dominating the El Tajin archaeological site.

The Amparo bowl contained no 13 Rabbit glyphs, nor any other obvious naming devices. Art historian Rex Koontz has recently documented the corpus of known El Tajin hieroglyphs on a web site, yet nothing in Koontz's examples corresponded with the inscrutable inscriptions on the Amparo bowl.

Dutifully, I recorded the vessel, its visible inscriptions and iconography into my ever-handy sketchbook. Tipped partially on its side, approximately one-third of the bowl was obscured from view. While drawing individual glyph blocks I noted their structural affinity with Maya writing: affixes in varying configurations attached to a main sign.

During my graduate coursework I had studied Maya hieroglyphic writing with preeminent epigraphers Michael Coe and David Stuart. While I was nearly certain that these were bona fide hieroglyphs (rather than "pseudo-glyphs"), I doubted it to be an aberrant form of Mayan writing. Moreover, I was sufficiently familiar with other Mesoamerican scripts to rule out a connection with any of the known systems of Central Mexico or Oaxaca.

Six months later I came across a similar bowl in the New Orleans Museum of Art (or NOMA, as it is known locally). Although lacking hieroglyphs the materials and mode of manufacture for both bowls appeared the same: orange-toned terra cotta colored clay, apparently pressed into a mold, creating a thin, smooth wall, textured with sculpted relief. The uniformly colored clay reflected the light with a subtle patina. The combination of thin vessel walls and lively iconography gave the appearance of fragile strength.

The NOMA bowl was deeper, with a smaller circumference than its Amparo counterpart, but it too claimed Veracruz origins. So why had I not known about this ceramics sphere? A procession of masked figures encircled the New Orleans vessel. The unvaried color and consistency of the clay made differentiating figure-ground relationships challenging, especially separated by the reflective glare of the display wall. I squinted, trying to flush out details: form from space defining the animated figures.

Back home I leafed through dozens of volumes on El Tajin and Classic Veracruz art and archaeology searching for hieroglyphs. Tajin offered little in the way of new insights apart from step-fret altars which I was now convinced were toponyms. I tested

this interpretation on Mary Miller, who felt that I was on to something. Still hoping to find a Classic Veracruz writing system, I had pitifully little to go on.

A few months later, in the Spring of 1998, I ran across *LA ICONOGRAFIA DE LA CERAMICA DE RIO BLANCO, VERACRUZ* (1996) by Hasso von Winning and Nelly Gutierrez Solana. The illustration on the cover was one of *my* pots, *and it had hieroglyphs!!*

The book, in fact, included several photographs and illustrations of these Rio Blanco bowls with cartouche-enclosed day signs and bar and dot numerals. These pots—some with hieroglyphs, some without—purportedly originated from the Mixtequilla region of southern Veracruz considerably to the south of El Tajin. I say *purportedly* since von Winning and Gutierrez Solana's artifacts lacked archaeological context, with the majority of vessels in private collections in Hollywood and Beverly Hills.

Testing the viability of turning this into a doctoral dissertation I made a reconnaissance trip to Veracruz and Tabasco—three parts adventure to one part frustration—chasing the ever-elusive Veracruz "hieroglyphic writing system."

This is not to say that Veracruz didn't have a wealth of hieroglyphic writing. Earlier periods produced stelae with Epi-Olmec text and Long Count dates at Tres Zapotes, La Mojarra, and Cerro de las Mesas. At Piedra Labrada and Maltrata hieroglyphic carvings covered monumental stone sculpture; but these hieroglyphs related more to Xochicalco in Late Classic Central Mexico than to the writing on my orange pots.

Everyone who has ever seriously worked in Veracruz complains bitterly about the lack of archaeological excavation. The modern State of Veracruz is rife with untouched

ancient sites; it is a veritable wealth of lost cities. El Pital, an unexcavated city reputed to be the size of Teotihuacan, epitomizes the blend of fascination and frustration so characteristic of Veracruz archaeology.

So, it was reasonable to imagine that these hieroglyphs and inscriptions were part of an as yet undiscovered world. I tend to be a bit of a romantic where these things are concerned.

As I was ruminating about lost cities and ancient mysteries, my friend Peter Selverstone startled me with an icy splash of cold water. Peter, an avocational Mesoamerican scholar and crack researcher, had uncovered drawings of a pot identical to the one I had originally seen in Puebla. Yet this bowl, and others like it, were from the Maya site of Seibal in the Petexbatun region of Guatemala.

The Seibal pots were part of a ceramic group known as Pabellon Modeled-carved Fine Orange—a name I vaguely remembered from the litany of ceramic types I had learned as a graduate student. Fine Orange ceramics, I recalled, were principal markers for the Maya collapse. And Pabellon bowls, I soon discovered, were rampant throughout much of the Terminal Classic Maya Lowlands.

What did it all mean? Who *were* these people? What was the relationship—if any—between the Pabellon and Rio Blanco ceramics?

And so I entered the ballcourt, the playing field, descending into the bewildering underworld of an archaeological mystery.

Chapter One:
Nature and Objectives of the Study

The Veracruz-Tabasco coastal plain forms an extraordinarily rich ecosystem. In addition to supplying luxury items such as cacao, cotton, vanilla, marine shell, rubber, skins, and feathers, this region was one of sustained agricultural fertility (Millon 1991:128; Diehl: 289). From Olmec times onward the Gulf Coast provided a continuous flow of both essential and elite goods.

A veritable greenhouse of abundance, the Veracruz corridor is the cradle of ancient Mesoamerican civilization; the heartland giving rise to an enigmatic people with complex society, monumental sculpture, grand scale earthworks, and a diagnostic art style. The Formative Period Olmec captures the popular imagination. If these people were the *Cultura Madre*, then their lush domain was America's Eden. Yet, after these auspicious beginnings, as identifiable Olmec traits seemingly disappear as a dominant influence in Mesoamerica, attention shifts to other stories, other places.

Mesoamerican scholarship has a long tradition of regional centrism. Classic and Postclassic periods are framed in terms of either the Valley of Mexico or lowland Maya. Consequently, Veracruz remains peripheral in most treatments of greater Mesoamerican interrelations. This is partially understandable since, El Tajin notwithstanding, the Veracruz-Tabasco coastal plain lacks a type-site reflecting a position of prominence.

Veracruz alone contains hundreds of unexcavated sites. El Pital, for example, offers us a tantalizing suggestion of hidden grandeur. Although reputed to be the size of Teotihuacan (Wilkerson 1997), El Pital remains a vast expanse of virgin mounds (Figure

1.3). For the time being we can only imagine the role this city played in ancient American history. In 1971, Garcia Payon (p.525) listed 577 archaeological zones in central Veracruz alone, noting that the data had "not yet defined a regional nomenclature of ceramics or summarized their typological correlations." That same year Tatiana Proskouriakoff, who defined the diagnostic characteristics of what she labeled "Classic Veracruz" style lamented that—

> "*Our inability to reconstruct the history of the...style is particularly unfortunate because such a history would have a relevance beyond that of the region itself*" (1971:571).

Nearly thirty years later Classic Veracruz remains largely a mystery. Fortunately critical research by Barbara Stark, Annick Daneels, Rex Koontz, Yamile Lira Lopez, Patricia Sarro and others is transforming this situation. This study attempts to add another piece to the mosaic of reconstructing ancient Veracruz history and interactions.

During the Mesoamerican Terminal Classic period, concurrent with the fall of Classic Maya cities, a hieroglyphic script appears throughout the corridor spanning north-central Veracruz south into the Maya lowlands. The signs of this system appear on architectural features, and on portable objects such as yokes and palmas associated with the rubber ballgame, which sees a revival in popularity at this time. Yet, it is on ceramic vessels where we see these hieroglyphs most frequently: Rio Blanco ceramics from the Mixtequilla of southern Veracruz and Pabellon Modeled-carved or Molded-carved vases and bowls originating in the distant Pasion drainage of northwestern Guatemala. In both ceramic spheres we see fine paste clays with little or no visible tempering pressed into half-molds, fired and then modified through carving; in both pictorial scenes frequently

augmented with square cartouche day signs, which are one of the most salient features of this heretofore unknown form of hieroglyphic writing.

The principal objective of this study is to identify the nature of this script through a testable structural analysis (see Chapter 2) of any and all diagnostic elements including: toponyms, personal names, orientation of symbols, numerals and coefficients, calendric signs, elements of phoneticism, totemic classifiers, affixes, reading order and directionality. Thus identified, I examine how this semiotic system fits into the development and trajectories of Mesoamerican writing spatially and temporally. Throughout the text I ask these questions: What does this writing tell us about the change in symbolic communication following the fall of Classic centers? Why do new writing systems appear during the Epiclassic period, disappearing shortly thereafter, while established systems begin to vanish or transform during this same time span? What can such changes in symbolic communication tell us about the social, political, and ideological matrix?

The goal is to crack the visual code, laying groundwork for further decipherment. This dissertation attempts to classify, describe, and analyze the scripts properties and mechanics; in short, identifying what kind of writing it is and how it functions.

This doctoral thesis does *not* attempt linguistic decipherment. Such an attempt would be premature at this stage of the process, which entails several steps. Maya epigraphers Nicolas Hopkins and Katherine Josserand (1998) describe sequential stages of hieroglyphic decipherment, beginning with a visual analysis of forms and patterns. We see support for their model embodied in the breakthroughs of ancient writing systems discussed below. As scholars on the history of writing rightly posit, phonetic

decipherment is contingent on: 1) knowledge of the spoken language—its grammar and syntax, and 2) a key connecting the graphic signs and their phonetic values with those of a known system. Michael Coe (Coe 1992) stresses the importance of an adequate hieroglyphic data base, as well as the cultural context--"above all traditions and histories giving place-names, and royal titles" (ibid). Segregated by centuries, migrations of peoples, and unreliable ethno-history, these crucial elements frequently disappear. Languages die. Lexico-statistical dating is an approximate science. Yet through archaeological finds (and often times incredible luck) lost scripts regain the voices of the ancients. Sounds frozen for hundreds, sometimes thousands of years thaw by virtue of the Rosetta's Stone or Landa's "alphabet," brought to life by the insightful genius of men like of Jean-Françoise Champollion (1790-1832) or Yuri Knorosov.

The history of Ancient Egyptian and Maya hieroglyphic decipherment illustrates the fact that some purely visual organization of the script and its inscriptions facilitates later linguistic analysis. The groundbreaking work of Champollion (Egyptian) and Knorosov (Mayan) not only relied on a key linking ancient scripts with more relatively recent ones; such work also drew on careful organization of the visual material.

The Egyptian practice of surrounding the names of pharaohs and deities in semi-rectangular cartouches aided epigraphers in cracking the hieroglyphic code. Unlike Champollion, the name Abbé Barthélemy is relatively unknown to non-scholars. Around 1762, Bathélemy rightly hypothesized that cartouches enclosed the names of the gods and kings (Coe 1992; Pope 1975). thus helping scholars to flush out critical visual information, which would lead to later decipherment.

The extraordinary efforts of French nobleman Comte de Caylus provided a critical resource for future scholars, including Champollion. In 1752 he published the first of his compilations of Egyptian hieroglyphic and non-hieroglyphic texts (Pope 1975), the earliest corpus of known inscriptions. Compte de Caylus underscored the supreme importance of accurate reproduction (ibid), and influenced the next generation, including Carsten Niebuhr, a Danish artist and scholar (ibid). Niebuhr worked extensively in Egypt. In 1774, he organized a table of hieroglyphs selected on the basis of objective criteria. Niebuhr's visual organization allowed scholars to determine the extant data base. Visual correspondences also revealed variations of style, and in this way limited the corpus to a manageable number of hieroglyphs (ibid). Through their patience, efforts to organize the material, and commitment to accurate reproduction Compe de Caylus and Niebuhr not only set the stage for future analyses; they provided artistic standards that were to profoundly influence later scholars. The commitment to accurate reproduction continues to this day in the University of Chicago's Epigraphic Survey.

Organizing hieroglyphs and inscriptions also proved instrumental to Maya hieroglyphic decipherment. Here we turn our attentions to the first Westerner attempting to document and classify the glyphs—Bishop Diego de Landa. Landa, for his part, was not by any stretch of the imagination, an epigrapher. And his motives were less than noble. As part of the New World Inquisition, Landa was responsible for wide-scale burning of the ancient Maya books—only four of which survive his destructive maelstrom. Even by the ruthless standards of 16th Century Spain, Landa's methods for dealing with the Maya proved extreme. His *Relación de las Cosas Yucatán*, documenting life and customs of the Maya, was as much a forced penance for his earlier extremism as

an encyclopedia for future scholars. Yet Landa knew that Maya hieroglyphs encoded phonetic values; he was just not aware that the Maya glyphs symbolized syllabic signs, rather than alphabetic ones. Given this fundamental misunderstanding, he forced the organization of similar sounds embodied by Maya logo-syllabic glyphs into what appeared to be corresponding values in the Spanish alphabet. Landa's misguided efforts eventually provided the Rosetta Stone for Maya hieroglyphic decipherment (Coe 1992; Harris and Stearns 1997; Robinson 1995).

In another ironic twist, Sir Eric Thompson (1898-1975) was the virtual dean of Maya scholarship during the mid-20th Century. Thompson staunchly refused to recognize the hieroglyphs as containing phonetic values, and thus by shear force of personality and position hindered the decipherment of Maya hieroglyphic writing for decades (Coe 1992, 1999; Harris and Stearns 1997; Robinson 1995). Yet Thompson amassed an exhaustive catalogue of extant hieroglyphs (Thompson 1962), providing an invaluable resource for later epigraphers. Like Niebuhr's work in Egypt, Thompson's strictly visual organization provides a sort of semiotic taxonomy and nomenclature, "read" largely through the shared pictorial properties of hieroglyphic symbols. If we look at this organization not as a system of meaning, but as a compendium of signs and their source, its value becomes apparent. Maya scholarship, for the time being, lacks a comprehensive "dictionary" of hieroglyphs. However we might criticize his schema, Thompson assembled known hieroglyphs (Thompson 1962, 1971); a corpus added to by subsequent Mayanists.

Both Heinrich Berlin and Tatiana Proskouriakoff linked glyphic attributes with categories and themes expressed in Maya writing. In 1958 Berlin described the graphic properties of what he called "Emblem Glyphs," rightly attributing these to Maya place

names. Berlin (1915-1987) recognized a set of standardized affixes attached to a variable main sign—a prefix to the left (which later scholars would read as *chu 'lel* or "holy"), and a superfix resting on top (the so-called Ben-Ich combination, read as *Ahaw* or "lord"). Berlin went on to identify Emblem Glyphs for several Maya sites, while providing the visual framework allowing Mayanists to locate others (Coe 1992; Robinson 1995).

Archaeological illustrator and an architect by training, Tatiana Proskouriakoff (1909-1985) first entered the ranks of Maya scholarship with her reconstruction drawings of Piedras Negras (Coe 1992). Her knowledge of visual structures permitted her to identify hieroglyphs for personal names, war events (the verb *chuk,* "to capture"), Maya queens, birth dates, and dates of royal accession. She recognized the historic nature of Classic Maya texts. As Michael Coe writes, she was a "woman whose brilliant research was to bring the ancient Maya civilization into history" (Coe 1992). Describing her inestimable contributions he goes on to say—

> "...Proskouriakoff's great breakthrough had very little to do with the Maya language: the texts might as well have been written in Swedish or Swahili for her immediate purpose, for her approach was merely *structural.* She was not the only epigrapher who worked largely in this mode, which was really concerned with meaning and interpretations rather than readings in one or another Mayan language" (Coe 1992).

Proskouriakoff exemplifies the gift of visual thinking inexorably linked to art and artistic production (the prevailing theme of Chapter 2).

Another valuable aid in the field of ongoing hieroglyphic decipherment is the Maya Hieroglyphic Corpus Project, centered at Harvard's Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. Like the University of Chicago's Epigraphic Survey, the Maya Hieroglyphic Corpus Project documents known hieroglyphic inscriptions through

careful rendering of monumental sculpture. These efforts prove invaluable in flushing out often difficult to read visual information, through accurate, as well as articulate, pen and ink drawings. The project, under the direction of artist Ian Graham, provides an extensive survey of provenienced inscriptions and related artwork (Coe 1992).

In both the Egyptian and Maya cases, visual approaches to hieroglyphic information provided essential groundwork useful in later phonetic decipherment. Accurate reproductions proved critical to these efforts. My aims are similar: to organize the visual information as a primer for linguistic interpretation. Owing to current delineations of scholarship, a name for this precise role in understanding hieroglyphs remains ambiguous. I am more *paleographologist* than *epigrapher*, since I focus my attention largely on the appearance of ancient writing; the visual properties of scripts rather than the structure of language encoded within such writing. This is not to say that these are closed borders, since my analysis entails some examinations of syntax as well as attributed meaning.

The early part of the 20th Century saw an emphasis on taxonomic and classificatory approaches to archaeological material. Later trends in Processual and Post-Processual Archaeology shift emphasis to contextual methodological theories for understanding cultural history and process (Hodder 1992). Yet we cannot underestimate the value of data amassed by this earlier generation of scholars. As theoretical approaches come and go, the importance of keeping detailed records retains its worth, despite flaws in the accompanying analyses.

Careful organization and analysis of visual information also allows scholars to differentiate one writing system from another. Arthur Evans never deciphered Linear B; yet sorting out the writing of Bronze Age Crete, he correctly recognized, documented, and classified three distinct scripts: a hieroglyphic script (on the Phaistos Disk), Linear A, and Linear B (Robinson 1995), setting the stage for future scholars. Likewise, contextual information allowed for separation of various Near Eastern cuneiform scripts into their assorted language systems (Pope 1975; Robinson 1995). In effect, these were early exercises in structural analysis. Curiously, Mesoamerican scholars focus little attention on the defining properties distinguishing one script or writing system from that of another. Consequently, Maya epigraphers use nebulous terms like "Mexican" for characterizing almost all forms of non-Maya writing. In Chapter 7, I tackle this problem, classifying known Mesoamerican scripts and hieroglyphic writing systems—again using a largely visual system of organization. This task yielded interesting results, informing the chapters on hieroglyphs to follow, as well as my ultimate conclusions on the nature of writing in Veracruz during the Late Classic-Early Postclassic transition (see Summary and Conclusions).

Preparing this dissertation I never found a satisfactory definition for *script* as distinct from *writing system.* Moreover, the distinction between *script* and *font (*or its hand-lettered equivalent) is likewise blurred. I address this topic in Chapter 7. Andrew Robinson offers an elegant and easy to comprehend treatment of sometimes difficult concepts in *The Story of Writing* (Robinson 1995). Robinson (p. 45) guides the reader through the "closely entwined" notions of language and script, while falling short of offering precise definitions so wonderfully illustrated through his examples.

Critical to the establishment of precise definitions is the inherent fusion of language and image in the written word, a theme explored in great detail in the next chapter. We can think of writing not only as the marriage of auditory and visual expressions—it is the *product* of that marriage. Like a child to its parents, writing fuses and reconfigures the inheritance of its progenitors. We readily discern the individual contributions of art and language, but in coming together the strains metamorphose in such a way that writing is neither entirely one nor both of its constituent parts.

The second goal of the study pertains to the two principle cultural areas--Veracruz and the Maya region—where we find similar hieroglyphs, iconography, and ceramic types. What are the manifestations of hieroglyphic forms and expressions in the regions, respectively? What is the relationship, if any, between Rio Blanco and Pabellon Molded-carved Fine Orange ceramics?

The questions invariably lead to broader and more difficult ones: what ethnic group or groups are purveyors or participants? What social processes were at play in the political vacuum following the collapse of major Classic centers?

Although definitive answers to these questions are beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is my hope that an examination of Classic Veracruz hieroglyphs and symbols will contribute to a broader knowledge of ancient Mesoamerican change and interaction, and inspire further work in the field of Veracruz writing and decipherment.

Figure 1.1 Map of ancient Mesoamerica. Cherra Wyllie

Figure 1.2 Map of ancient Veracruz showing key archaeological sites. Cherra Wyllie

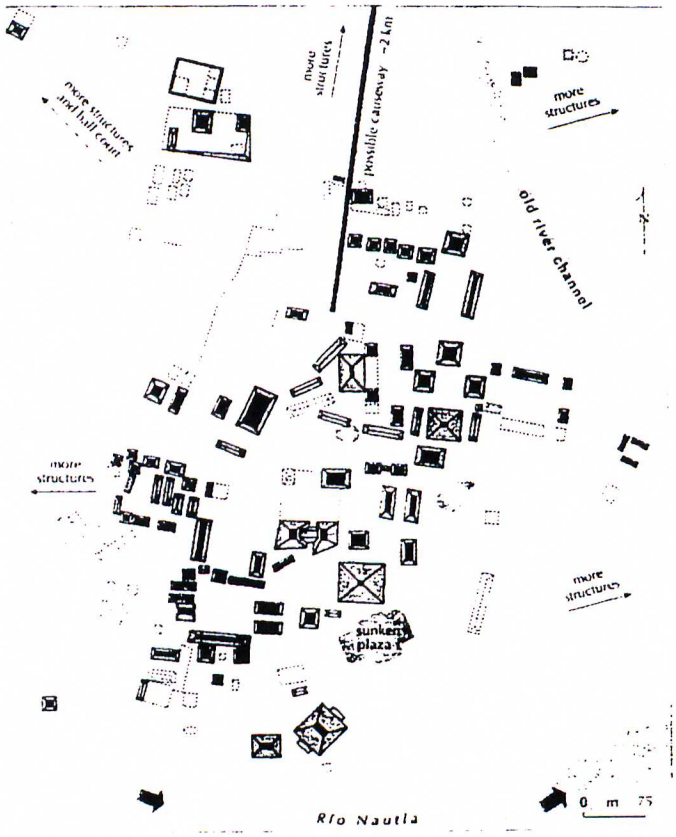


Figure 1.3 Map of El Pital, from Wilkerson 1997.

Chapter Two

Cognitive-Structural Analysis: A Theory, A Method

I think in images rather than words. Like many artists, translating these non-verbal images into linear modes of language and text presents enormous conceptual challenges. Even between spoken languages, some scholars such as George Steiner (Steiner 1998), claim that translations of unqualified accuracy are impossible. Recent neurological studies tend to bear them out.

In this dissertation I analyze a previously unknown or little recognized codified symbol system. I set out to prove that this system represents a type of hieroglyphic writing present in Veracruz and disseminated elsewhere in Mesoamerica during the Late Classic-Early Postclassic period. The scribes that generated the pictorial and written documents found on architectural relief carvings, ballgame paraphernalia, monumental sculpture, and portable ceramics were working artists, and by the criterion established in the section below, "visual thinkers." This is not to say that Mesoamerican scribal-artists produced what might loosely be called "picture writing." Even in fully developed logo-phonetic writing, hieroglyphs retained their fundamentally pictorial form, and the interface between text and image was never fully divorced.

We find the interrelationship of image and text in ancient Mesoamerica underscored by terminology in a wide-range of languages. The Mexica called their scribes or manuscript painters *Tlacuilo* (or *Tlacuiloani)* ((Soustelle 1961), deriving from the Nahuat'l word *cuili,* meaning both "to write" and "to paint." Likewise, among the

ancient Classic Maya the title *Ah Dzib* simultaneously means "he of writing" or "he of painting", and is roughly translated as scribe (Coe 1992). The Mixtec use similar although not identical terms, with *tay huisi taca* the word for painter, while the Mixtec scribe was known as the *huisi tacu* –"he whose craft it is to write." *Huisicara* refers to the finest artist or scribe (Marcus 1992). The Zapotec language also makes no particular distinction between the terms for writing and painting: the *huezeequichi* is "a person who paints (or writes) on paper," *tozeeayyequich* means "to put a picture or glyph on paper," and *ticha yyee caaquichi* a "picture or glyph message written on paper" (Marcus 1992:69-70).

The conceptual fusion of art and writing, artist and scribe is not exclusive to Mesoamerica. In ancient Egyptian writing the same verb was employed for "write" and "paint" (Fischer 1989). Like Mesoamerican scripts, Egyptian writing retained its essentially pictorial form, creating a wealth of interplay and even visual pun-making.

There is an ongoing debate in Mesoamerican scholarship on what is or is not "writing." I hope to distance myself from this colloquy, to say only that it is a matter of definition. Whether "writing" or "visual symbolic expression," the relationship between picture and word is evident in the wide-ranging realm of Mesoamerican scripts. This range encompasses:

1. Pictorial, yet highly established canonical and iconographic systems containing few if any recognizable hieroglyphs.

(Examples: Olmec; Teotihuacan).(Figure 2.1)

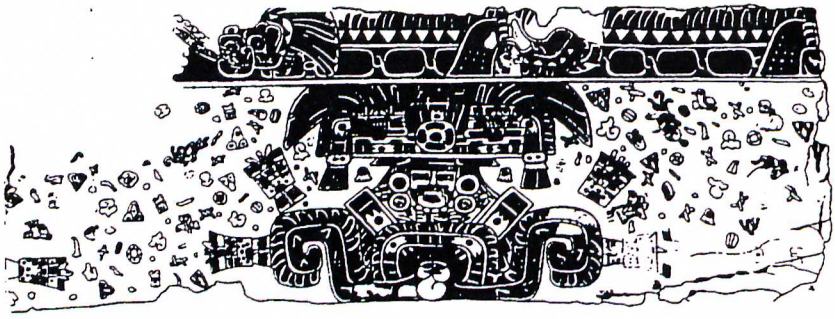


Figure 2.1 Los Glifos Mural, Teotihuacan after James C. Langley 1993 Figure 8, page 136

2. Pictorial narrative supplemented by hieroglyphs serving as captions.

(Examples: Mixtec, Aztec).(Figure 2.2)

Figure 2.2 The marriage of 10 Deer and 8 Wind from the Mixtec Codex Nuttal from Marcus 1992, Figure 8.9, page 237

3. Hieroglyphic text capable of serving independently of pictorial imagery.

(Example: Mayan). (Figure 2.3)

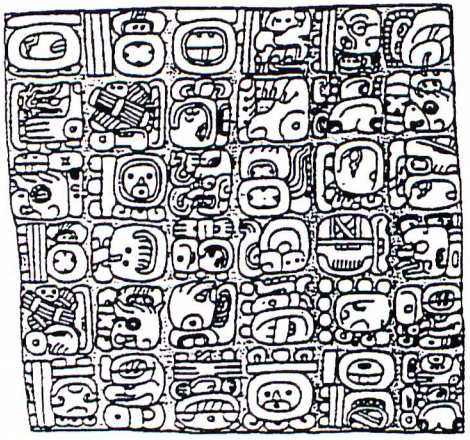


Figure 2.3 Classic Maya Altar Q from Copan
Drawn by Linda Schele from Harris and Stearns 1997, Figure 9.10

Figure 2.3 Stela 6 from
Zapotec Stela 6, Monte Alban, Oaxaca
Drawing by Mark Orsen from
Marcus 1992, Figure 11.42, p. 406.

4. Any of the possible combination in-between.

(Examples: Xochicalco, Zapotec, Nuine). (Figure 2.4)

I describe the diagnostic attributes of these scripts and symbol systems in Chapter 7. For the nonce, let us confine ourselves to:

1. Examining the role and identity of scribal artists, and how these characteristics informed the development, structure, and appearance of ancient writing.
2. Establishing a methodological theory for identifying the nature, properties and function of the hieroglyphic writing or symbol system of the Veracruz Classic.

Do Artists Think Differently?

Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner links visual arts with "spatial intelligence." Spatial intelligence is "associated with the right hemisphere of the brain (in complementary relation to linguistic processing which in right-handed persons is associated with the left hemisphere) and which can be described as a kind of gift of mental imaging" (Barry 1997; Gardner 1993). Gardner revolutionized education during the 1980's with his theory of multiple intelligences—seven discrete, autonomous domains of intellect. Gardner's schema includes musical intelligence, bodily kinesthetic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, linguistic intelligence, spatial intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, and intrapersonal intelligence (Ibid.). He later added an eighth modality of intelligence--Patterning--"characterized by the ability to see patterns in nature." In a functioning adult these independent faculties work in concert. Nevertheless, individuals privilege learning through one or more of these domains. These conscious and unconscious biases arise through the ease by which we process information; our individual formulas of comprehension and self-expression.

For two academic years during the 1970's I tutored public school children diagnosed with learning disabilities; children of above average intelligence who nevertheless possessed neurological deficiencies in their abilities to learn within certain prescribed patterns. I facilitated treatment in the remediation of student problems in such areas as fine and gross motor skills, auditory discrimination, visual discrimination, auditory memory, visual memory, directionality and spatial awareness, and dyslexia. Gardner's findings reinforced my own observations, and ultimately shaped the nature of

my pedagogy. The way our individual brains are hard-wired steers us to the path of least resistance. When an individual's learning formulas in one or more domains of intelligence is particularly adept, we in our culture say that that person is "gifted"; conversely, when a person is learning-challenged in any given area—but particularly those modes of intelligence valued by the *status quo* (as assessed by grades and standardized test scores), the deficit is classified as "a disability". In short, writes Barry (Barry 1997)—

> "The educational system champions a linguistic intelligence that habituates us to look for and accept "right" answers according to linguistic or mathematical processing; to think vertically in terms of logic, and to overestimate the value of linear logical thinking."

Nevertheless, the broad spectrum and diversity of learning styles clearly affords us an adaptive advantage as a species.

We cannot assume that all cultures favor linguistic intelligence, nor the scientific reasoning and deductive logic that only became part of the Western intellectual tradition in the 17th Century. As far back at Plato, philosophers have argued adamantly for the primacy of one sense over another. In non-Western cultures the respective weights of the senses are varied.

For the past five and a half years I have been particularly interested in ways that visual artists process and communicate information. I teach ancient and non-Western Art History at the University of Hartford, Connecticut. The vast majority of students in my upper-level courses are pursuing Bachelor of Fine Arts degrees through Hartford Art School, a division of the university. These are artists in training: painters, illustrators,

photographers, sculptors, ceramists, and graphic designers. I model my teaching philosophy on Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, Kurt Hahn's model of experiential challenge-based learning, and the principles of John Dewey. Students, I believe, learn in distinct ways; they not only absorb knowledge, if given the chance, through unique channels, they *transmit* what they learn through expressions most suitable to those learning styles. This is why the eloquent "language" of artists, literary authors, mathematicians, and automobile mechanics is markedly different. As an educator working primarily with visual artists in academic subject areas, addressing "the way artists think" becomes paramount in devising effective teaching and evaluation strategies. To these ends, I created courses and assignments designed to accommodate the learning styles of artists. I note with some interest, that (like me) these students frequently supplement or substitute class lecture notes for pictures; their "doodles" and illustrations serving as mnemonic devices.

We cannot adequately analyze visual structures without understanding visual thinking. Visual artists, by nature, "think in images." Visual processing resides in a separate part of the brain from that used for spoken language and auditory processing. Neurologist Martha J. Farah tells us that "imagery and verbal thought depend on at least partially distinct neural processes" (Farah 1989) Farah 1984:398).

Evidence for the operation of these distinct neural processes comes from studies of dementia, autism, and split-brain imaging. These studies not only help us to conceptualize this neurological compartmentalization, but also allow us to see image making as a semi-autonomous function.

Bruce L. Miller (Miller 1998) studied artists suffering from frontotemporal dementia—a rare form of dementia accounting for approximately ten percent of all dementia cases. In several of Miller's subjects, artistic ability developed or heightened as the disease progressed, "and continued to flourish even as the patients began to lose their ability to use language" (ibid). Patients experienced cell loss in front of the temporal lobes, with cell loss greater of the left side of the brain. Yet, the rear of the temporal lobes-- the portion of the brain interpreting visual experience in terms of color, shape, and movement-- remained unaffected. As one part of the brain was impaired, activity in the other area heightened dramatically. Frontotemporal demetia devastated social skills and language, while visual skills not only remained intact, they were "enhanced" (Strachan 2001).

Many autistic artists possess the uncanny ability to produce lifelike works of art, after only glimpsing their subjects; mentally "photographing" the image conveyed (Barry 1997:85). Such artists were first labeled by the pejorative term "idiot savant" in the late 1800's. They often show remarkable skill in reproducing line, perspective, detail, and form, whether in drawing or sculpture, even though I.Q. can fall within the lower ranges of the scale (Alonzo Clemons is such a sculptor with an I.Q. of 50) (ibid).

Experiments in split-brain activity involve patients with right and left hemispheres of the brain surgically severed at the corpus collosum (Barry 1997:96). Dartmouth College neuroscientist Michael Gazzaniga studies these subjects, investigating communications between different mental modalities, and their interpretive fluidity (or lack thereof) (Barry:94). His experiments in split-brain activity show that when a word such as "walk" is flashed only to the right side of the brain, the left hemisphere of the

brain—responsible for linguistic processing in most people-- will not receive the message. Yet later, when the subject is let go, he or she will act on the impulse to walk, without understanding the motivations behind such actions (Barry: 96).

Even in visual perception the brain intercepts the barrage of optic data it receives, imposing a sense of meaning out of these external stimuli (Barry 1997: 15-16 and 37 [Gibson 1969]). Yet apparently this process is far less mediated by the brain than language, which developed much later. The mental imagery system shares the same neurological structures and processes as vision: the temporal, occipital, and parietal cortex (Barry 1997:74, and Farah 1984:269).

> "In developmental experience, word not only comes later than images, but they are also often inadequate in communicating it, precisely because they are removed from experience and therefore lack the immediacy and power of the real world's change and relativity. Brain imaging data reveals, for example, that thinking in images is different than thinking in language, and imagery and verbal thought have different behavior consequences." (Barry 1997:74).

By contrast—

> "Verbal language is abstract, essentially linear, and achieves its functionality by the application of culturally derived codes once removed from direct experience, and from explicit rules of perception. Perceptual logic, however is holistic, immediate, and experientially rooted." (Barry:116).

There have been several seminal studies on visual perception and learning. Yet psychological and neurological studies specifically focusing on artistic process are in their infancy. This is complicated by Western bias in art—favoring the representational over the symbolic. The processes and objectives of representational art are inherently different to those in symbolic art. The aforementioned studies in autism, dementia, and split-brain activity convincingly prove that it is possible to create photo-realistic representation

divorced from any underlying structure or meaning. Symbolic art, conversely, incorporates more fully integrated neurological processes. This view runs contrary to the ideas of British anthropologist Steven Mithen. Mithen sees the representative "realism" of Upper Paleolithic cave paintings as evidence that anatomically modern Homo sapiens sapiens transcended what he calls the "domain-specific" behavior of our human ancestors (Mithen 1994b, 1996). The sophistication inherent in these paintings in his view provides evidence for the integration of separate, virtually autonomous "chapels of the mind".

As we have seen, representational art can be produced with an only partially functioning brain, so that the paintings are not proof in and of themselves of fully integrated neural processes. However, I agree with Mithen that the Franco-Cantabrian caves provide markers of a milestone in the evolution and complexity of human intelligence. Physical anthropologist Terrance Deacon (Deacon 1997) suggests that what really sets us apart as a species is our adeptness in creating and manipulating symbols. Apart from the animation and lifelike quality of paintings from such sites as Chauvet (30,000 B.P.) and Lascaux (15,000 B.P.) is the presence of techtiforms in relation to these images. "Text" (if we can be so bold as to refer to these symbols in this manner) and image form apparently separate but related functions. Despite the time-depth of this tradition (15,000 years), it nevertheless seems prodigious at this early date.

By contrast, preliterate humans elsewhere appear to polarize art with the burden of multi-tasking. The animate quality and power of art to narrate returns when writing—encapsulating visible speech—liberates image to form a distinct function.

Charlotte Otten writes that while in modern Western culture we ordinarily define a fact in writing, "*in pre-literate or proto-literate culture the art symbol becomes the fact;*

that is it simultaneously represents, defines and manifests its referent" (Otten 1971). This may in part help to explain why so-called "primitive" art is not more fully representational—it bears the additional burden of having to function as both image and text, while not being fully either. Yet, here too, the transmission of both the form and content of the message are conveyed through the hand of the artist.

Looking at artists serving a dual function as scribes suggests yet another dimension in the process and product of visual symboling. The past five and a half centuries since the advent of moveable type represents the last broad segment in the incremental segregation between image and text. As text moved from the scriptorium to the composing room, artists and calligraphers no longer claimed exclusive domain over the transcription of the written word. Since even those possessing no artistic skills whatsoever can churn out documents on laptop computers, we must stretch our imaginations to conjure a time when text was mediated through the hand and eye of the artist. Early hieroglyphic writing represents a stage when the appearance of text was pictorial; when the relationship between text and image, artist and scribe was virtually indistinguishable.

To inhabit the thought processes of scribal artists requires us to view "art" and "artist" as not so much general categories, but specific ones. Artists engaged in symbolic communication provide a distinctly different function than that of mimesis or representation. Yet, they do so through the medium of visual signs. Their primary "language" is the image.

With the appearance of writing the relationship between spoken language and visual pictures becomes manifest. "Verbal language is essentially a linear system imposed on non-linear experience" (Barry 1997:107). H.A. Groenewegen-Frankfort (Groenewegen-Frankfort 1987) and Henri Fischer (Fischer 1986, 1989) demonstrate the ways that the emergence of writing in the Near East influences the form and function of art. We can compare the two examples below: the Hierakonpolis Murals, produced before the invention of writing in ancient Egypt and the Narmer Palette, an example of early Egyptian writing.

The Predynastic Wall Painting from Hierakonpolis (Figure 2.5) takes place in depthless, undifferentiated space. Nothing integrates the figures into anything resembling cohesion. A few clustered figures suggest that the mural symbolizes an event or possibly a series of events. Yet, nothing guides our eye, nothing offers insight into the temporal sequence of actions depicted. The work as a whole is not spatially related, but rather seems to float in a nebulous suspension of time and space.

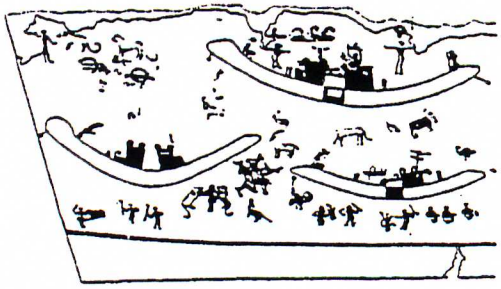


Figure 2.5 Predynastic Wall Painting from Hierakonpolis from Groenewegen-Frankfort 1987, Figure 2, page 17

By contrast, the Narmer Palette provides history and narrative sequence along with the introduction of hieroglyphs. Figures are relegated to placement on ground lines, which govern their sequential order. This imposition of artistic canons within the framing devices funnels the direction of the action and gives way to a similar use of hieroglyphic registers. Registers, in turn, move the eye through the succession of hieroglyphs.

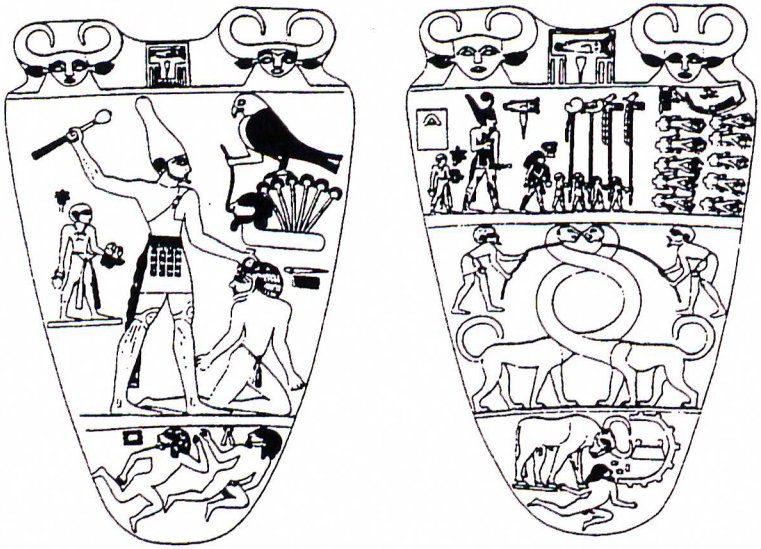


Figure 2.6 Ceremonial palette of Narmer reverse and obverse from Fischer 1989, Figure 1, page 60 (After J E. Quibell, "Slate Palette from Hierakonpolis," in *Zeitschrift fur Agyptische Sprache* 36 (1898), pls. 12,13).

Writing changes the appearance of art specifically because it introduces the linearity and structure of language. The visual system, like the auditory one, becomes sequential. Taken in this light it is little wonder that the introduction of non-cyclical time counts, the appearance of historical narrative, and advances in numerical systems roughly coincide with the introduction of logo-phonetic writing in civilizations worldwide. However, we must remember that in these early writing systems the linearity of speech is

always mediated through the more "intuitive" responses of the visual. As such, early writing can never be fully the domain of linguists.

And so how does this marriage between image and text function through the officiary of scribal-artists? I offer this working premise: artists (especially graphic designers whose work most closely approximates the former role held by scribal-artists) potentially offer us insights into the origins, structure, and mechanics of writing and visual symbolism. This position is partially contingent on a supposition set forth here: writing was the brainchild of creative artistic invention. Rather than serving as mere intercessors or vassals of political authority, through their mastery of visual symbolic communication artists controlled the medium wherein lay the message. This seems to be partially supported by the social position held by scribes in ancient societies. In ancient Mesoamerica these scribal artists were members of the royal household.

Applying my working hypothesis, I wish to outline observations that afforded me insights into these processes. At the outset, these findings may be construed as spurious, since these observations were not part of a controlled experiment or data set. For the time being we can look at them merely as general impressions.

First, artists are especially adept in "reading" and identifying visual patterns in hieroglyphic writing. Secondly, artists possess unique skills for creating and developing new forms of visual communications.

Patterning and spatial intelligence are necessary attributes for scribal-artists, and their modern day counterparts in the field of graphic design. Since the integration of text (or "visible speech") is essential to these professions, some measure of linguistic intelligence ("scribal error" notwithstanding!) is prerequisite. Visual fine-motor

coordination is another integral quality, especially in the creation of official or public texts in systems where writing and drawing (e.g.—painting, incising) are synonymous. Ideas and documents were likely dictated to some extent by those in authority with no drawing skills, but clearly linguistic skills do not naturally translate into artistic aptitudes or abilities; nor do such abilities on the part of artists transmit to eloquence for conveying spoken language. To this end, most of us know articulate individuals who can not draw a circle freehand, and talented artists who are not especially articulate.

It was Yale Professor Michael Coe (teaching a class on Maya Hieroglyphic Writing in 1992) who first suggested to me that visual artists essentially saw things differently from non artists. At the time Coe was trying to gain insights on artists and artistic production for *The Art of the Maya Scribe*, a book he was co-authoring with Justin Kerr (Coe and Kerr 1998). He encouraged me to trust my instincts as an artist and calligrapher, and cited contributions made by artists such as Tatiana Proskouriakoff, David Stuart, and Linda Schele in the field of Maya hieroglyphic decipherment. Three years later I began college teaching. Coe's impressions seemed substantiated by my own observations.

I occasionally offer workshops in Maya hieroglyphic writing at the University of Hartford, where most of my students are in the art school. As a Teaching Fellow I offered a similar workshop to Yale undergraduates in an Anthropology class. It suffices to say, the verbal and analytical skills of Yale undergraduates are among the highest in the nation. Comparative data can be seen in Table 2.1 below.

	Yale University Undergraduate Freshmen	*University of Hartford Undergraduate Freshmen*
SAT Verbal scores (average)	690-780	470-570
SAT mathematics scores (average)	690-770	480-580
Ranked top quarter of High School class	99%	28%
Ranked top tenth of High School class	95%	9%

Table 2.1: Comparative data of incoming Freshmen at Yale University and the University of Hartford. *Source: The College Board Handbook (2002)*

Yet the Hartford art students comprehended the hieroglyphic information far more rapidly and comprehensively than the Yale students. Since the Yale students intellectualized the experience they asked insightful questions. The art students, on the other hand, began playfully exploring how to manipulate the glyphs into rudimentary texts. Yale students took notes. Hartford students made drawings. The academic students seemed interested in reading the text; the art students in creating new texts.

Peter Keeler is a linguist by training and Director of the Maya Meetings at the University of Texas, Austin. He offers introductory workshops in Maya hieroglyphic writing to a wide range of participants in such forums as university seminars, graphic design firms, and organizations like MENSA. On two occasions Keeler offered glyph classes for my students at the University of Hartford. Keeler's general impressions matched my own: artists seemed to intuit the information, comprehending and assimilating more rapidly than other populations. Parenthetically, he confided to me that individuals who tried to unduly dissect and analyze the visual information had substantially more difficulty.

My second hypothesis—that artists are adept at not only comprehending visual information, but generating it—was also corroborated by the art students; predominantly graphic designers. I designed a course on Image and Text, a semester-long investigation into the interrelationship of art and writing. Topics included such themes as origins of writing and pictorial narrative. Assignments incorporated experiential-based learning. I offered the course Spring semester 1999, and again the following year. Nearly all students were Graphics Design majors.

In one assignment students were asked to produce "books" (a term loosely defined). Structure and content were entirely at the discretion of the student; however the "books" needed to convey a series of ideas or images within a sequential order or "telling." Secondly, the medium of that telling could be either images or symbols, but not writing as we know it (unless the student chose to develop his or her own writing system). A page explaining the images, symbols, structure, and content of the book, written by the student, accompanied the completed project .

Next, students were given one another's books to decode. Accuracy of translation was not so important as developing (and explaining) a systematic approach to decipherment. This forced students to consider the intellectual and methodological processes allowing them to infer meaning from visual information. Also, since process superseded product, students were dissuaded from conferring with each other to come up with the "right" answer.

Designed as a heuristic devise illustrating the nature of visually-mediated communication, the exercise immediately assumed new dimensions. Students produced aesthetically-pleasing books using novel forms. Deconstructing pre-conceived notions on

the nature of "books" and "writing" freed student-artists in exploring new expressive possibilities. The conceptual sophistication embodied in these books, most often sharply contrasted with below average levels in written expression or verbal skills. By *conceptually sophisticated* I mean that the symbol (or what Peirce (Hoopes 1991) calls *representman*) surpassed verbal or written language in its ability to approximate what it means or symbolizes. Visual analogy, while representing a symbolic mode of thought, nevertheless does not appear to be entirely contingent on skills used in verbal processing. Barry (1997:87) describes analogy as—

> "our basic means of extending former experience into the future and of creating understandable images for others. Analogy through metaphor or symbol is not only the basis for perceptual learning, but also the form of communication between the conscious and subconscious mind."

Visual symbolizing according to both psychologist Carl Jung (Jung 1964) and Structural Anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss (Levi-Strauss 1962) affords us a window into a trans-cultural cognitive map. In their book projects students activated gestalts of this visual symbolic logic by what Howard Gardner classifies as "raw patterning ability"—a processes which approximates that used by perceptual psychologists at the beginning of the 20th Century to describe "the inner dynamic of Gestalt formation."

The efficiency by which artists can devise and activate visual semiotic systems should not be underplayed. It would be hard to imagine other domains of intelligence, such as musical intelligence or mathematical intelligence, devoid of musical or mathematical notation. Suffice to say that such systems would function far less efficiently if bound by linguistic constraints. Moreover, such notations are inter-linguistic; that is to say they transcend the boundaries of language. Those of us who are not mathematical

theorists or musical composers can often read, comprehend, and apply mathematical or musical symbolic notation, yet would be less proficient at generating such notations into new and meaningful patterns.

Artistic creativity is the triage of: visual thinking, the manual dexterity to translate mental images into physical forms, and invention of symbolic analogues. Artists not only see the world in pictures, they translate the world *into* visual images. Writing and symbolic communication is the outward and visible sign of speech translated into image.

Visual Analysis: Search For a Method

In the late 19th Century Anthropologists began making systematic studies of signs and symbols hoping to flush out universal qualities that would allow them to decode embedded meaning. Franz Boas (1858-1942) embodied this search for underlying universals and variable qualities in visual representation long before subsequent analyses by Structural Anthropologists, and later Cognitive Anthropologists. Boas' study of symbolic art provides an especially important observation: the same symbol can provide different meanings in different societies (Boas 1955).

Ian Hodder writes that material culture "is constituted within frameworks of conceptual meaning" (1992:12). Patterning, links, and associations, consequently, are embedded with symbols and symbolic meaning. Emphasis is placed on understanding why particular symbols are used in particular context, and form part of the material record of social processes (Hodder 1992:108). Therefore, the style, symbols, and structures contained within art are essentially meaningless outside their cultural context. If so, how can we "read" or understand the symbolic art of another culture?

Structuralism

One theory is that the underlying code or "universal" providing meaning to symbolic patterns comes from Structuralism. Hodder (Hodder 1992) uses structuralist principles of binary oppositions, and the functional relationships between various subsystems, as a basis for archaeological analysis (Hodder: 25 and 27). Structuralism in archaeology derives largely out from the work of French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss. Levi-Strauss applied rules of Structural Linguistics developed by Ferdinand de Saussure in the creation of a Structural Anthropology. Signs, whether manifest in linguistics, myth-making, or art provide the fundamental concepts as either neutral images or active concepts (Burnham 1971). The signs of art are materials, colors, shapes, and other qualities that can be orchestrated in numerous associations and combinations. The artist, like the mythmaker, by creating new permutations of these signs, alters their symbolic value and thus creates the potential for future signification (Burnham 1971:10; Levi-Strauss 1962:21). Signs themselves are derived from nature. For example, Levi-Strauss (1964:19) tells us that "colors exist in painting only because of the prior existence of colored objects and beings; and only through a process of abstraction can they be separated from their natural substrata and treated as elements in an independent system." Although originating in nature, color like other signs becomes the *bricoleur's* tool in the creative process of formulating and reformulating within a system of classificatory or taxonomic combinatorics. Seen in this light, colors are symbols revealing the unity of opposites within the logic of totemic classification (Levi-Strauss 1962:62) or as implements for giving conceptual form to abstract notions of space and time (1962:138-143).

Roland Barthes' *Semiology* expanded on Levi-Strauss' structuralism. Taking his cue from linguistics, Barthes examined the distinctions separating the *signifier* and *signified* in semiotics (Burnham 1971:22). Single signs are formed by the inseparable counterparts of sign and signifier that derive meaning when juxtaposed with other signs (ibid). Motivated signs embody analogies between signifier and signified "where parts of the sign seem to have an unlearned or intrinsically logical relation to each other" (ibid). With regard to art—

> "Naturalistic painting and sculpture is the extensive use of motivated signs. Such signs, including language used in art, provide culture with valuable sources of self-definition. Thus as a rule in art, motivated signs serve as aesthetically imposed signs systems" (Burnham:23).

Barthes views all forms of non-objective art as a metalanguage within a semiological system.

Signs and symbols manifest in art are viewed not only as meaningfully constituted material culture (Hodder 1995:84), but whose meaning is re-contextualized by the perception of others. The symbolic properties of art, then, are those of the artist as producer of symbolic "text," as well as those of the reader and interpreter (ibid).

In *This Is Not A Pipe* (Foucault 1981) French philosopher Michel Foucault examines the interrelationship of text (words) and images (resemblances). When text and image are conjoined one is always subordinate to the other within a hierarchical configuration. Yet, it is possible for an image to function as text, and text as image.

Structuralism provides a tool for deciphering encoded meanings in visual symbols. In art, analysis involves close examination of pattern frequencies and visual correspondences. Anthropologist Andre Leroi-Gourhan (Leroi-Gourhan) applied this

approach to his studies of Upper Paleolithic art, especially Franco-Cantabrian cave paintings.

Structural analysis has been successfully applied to understanding Maya hieroglyphic texts; a method made popular by the late Linda Schele in her Advanced Seminars on hieroglyphic writing held during the annual Maya Meetings at the University of Texas, Austin. In structural analysis, texts are divided into their constituent clauses. These clauses are then broken down into grammatical elements ((Harris and Stearns 1997).

Structural analysis applied to both art and hieroglyphic text, is contingent on flushing out visual analogies. However, in the case of hieroglyphic writing which encodes spoken language, "structures" involve clear syntactical relationships. To make sense of corresponding signs, a knowledge of the structure of the spoken language is enormously helpful. For example, in Maya speech and grammar, clauses have a T-V-O-S (temporal-verb-object-subject) syntactical order (Harris and Stearns 1997:87-88). In visual symbols or "encoded art", signs are not grammatically motivated; a visual system of order can fully exist without linguistic structure. Yet very often structuralist methodology is applied interchangeably to the analysis of both artistic symbols and writing.

Since we established that: 1) visual and linguistic processing are the domains of separate neural processes, 2) Writing imposes syntax or linear structure on art and visual information, we can logically conclude that hieroglyphic writing and symbolic art contain different structures. By virtue of these structures, writing and symbolic art should be

visually distinctive. Thus, the resulting visual properties should aid us in understanding the nature of the semiotic system at hand.

As I grappled with the inherent contradictions of Structuralism (a theory and method that I found potentially useful and attractive), I was plagued by certain nagging questions. The predominantly French philosophers espousing Structuralist Theory (even the so-called Post-Modern theorists) never entirely explained *which structures*. What neural processes shaped the "structures," governed them, I wondered. Could I entirely ignore the cognitive dimensions of writing, art, and symbol making?

Part of my confusion lay in unanswered questions on the separate but interrelated areas of speech, language, signing, visual communications, and writing. Noam Chomsky, for example, talks about "deep structures" in linguistics. Are the "deep structures" of "language" necessarily related to *spoken* language, or do such patterns reside in an altogether different area of the brain?

Gestures are thought to be a precursor to speech and yet, as visual signs these also have much in common with artistic symbols. Gesture falls between language and visual image. It is at once both and neither. Gesture and signing often relies on "picture building" (Kendon 1993). For example, among the Warlpiri of Australia several signs derive from strictly pictorial origins.

Carolyn Scroggs studied the signs invented by a deaf nine year old who had no training in conventional signing systems for the hearing impaired. When faced with a new concept, the child first used pantomime, and later went on to more abbreviated representation for the same idea, and finally to elements. In other words, he spontaneously devised a means of symbolic abstraction (Kendon 1993:57). Other studies

of improvised sign language by deaf children show that they inevitably create language-like systems of their signs (Goldin-Meadows 1993; Goldin-Meadows and Mylander 1998). It has recently been demonstrated that these improvised sign systems tend to formulate a standardized syntax structure. Deaf children observed in the United States and Taiwan developed similarly structured sign systems. Neither, however, bore a direct relationship to the grammatical organization of either English or Chinese. The two respective languages are remarkably different (Goldin-Meadows and Mylander 1998:278-281). Since these children have never *heard* language spoken, we might presuppose that ideas are being formulated and worked into systematic relationships based upon *visual* patterning within the human brain.

Cognitive Archaeology

Included in the cognitive-processual archaeology developed largely by Colin Renfrew (Mithen 1994a; Renfrew 1994; Renfrew and Bahn 1991) is a scientific examination of the human ability to construct and use symbols (Renfrew 1994:5). A symbol is defined as "*a visible sign of an idea or quality or of another object*" (Ibid [Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 1925:974]). Therefore, symbolic representations within art are aspects of cognition whose validation rests on testability (Renfrew 1994:6). Renfrew and Paul Bahn (1991:363) believe that a culture's system of art and representation offers the greatest insight into its cognitive map.

Accordingly, the ability to use symbols is what most clearly distinguishes human beings from other animals (1993:339). However, meaning ascribed to symbols is specific to particular cultural traditions (Franz Boas said essentially the same thing within a

different theoretical framework over a half-century earlier). Further defining the methods of Cognitive Archaeology Renfrew writes--

> "It is usually impossible to infer the meaning of a symbol within a given culture from the symbolic form of the image or object alone. At the very least we have to see how that form is used, and see it in the context of other symbols. Cognitive archaeology has therefore to be careful about specific context of other symbols. Cognitive archaeology has therefore to be very careful about specific contexts of discovery: it is the assemblage, the ensemble, that matters, not the individual object in isolation.....depictions and material objects (artifacts) do not directly disclose meaning to us.."

Research in the field of cognitive science offers neurological explanations of topics related to art and visual culture such as James Gibson's and D. Marr's studies of light patterns and perceptions of contours in viewing different objects, (Segal 1994) or the nature of visual perception as seen by Gestalt psychologists Werteimer, Kohler, and Koffka (ibid [Kohler 1947; Koffka 1935]). Erwin Segal suggests that concepts are methods developed by cognitive science that can be successfully applied to archaeology in examining the planning, design, and construction of objects (Segal 1994:26-28).

Epigenetic science stresses the role of gene-culture co-evolution; the neurological linkage between biological and cultural evolution (Lumsden and Wilson 1981)nd 35). Both Epigeneticists and Cognitive Processualists distance themselves from what Lumsden and Wilson (1981:36) refer to as "biogenetic structuralism"—"*the notion of linking structuralist conceptions to neurobiology and genetics,*" integrating the ideas of Piaget, Levi-Strauss, Chomsky, and others.

Cognitive Structuralism

If structures observed by Levi-Strauss, Barthes, and others are valid observable phenomena, then they are shaped by cognitive processes. Visual patterns quite obviously mirror transmissions of thought, filtered through the sieve of culture. Writing and visual (non-linguistic) symbols represent separate—although not entirely unrelated—manifestations of cognitive structure. Methodology used in this thesis, therefore, represents a hybrid of applied Structural and Cognitive Theories. In applying this idea I adduce the following:

1. Visual analysis is the first, necessary step in any hieroglyphic decipherment.
2. Various forms of "writing" or codified visual communication should be observably different—one from another.
3. Image and text are conjoined in hieroglyphic writing. Yet, as Foucault asserts in such pairings one half is always subordinate to the other within a hierarchical configuration. Since it is my contention that artists are the purveyors of visual language and image, image will dominate text in early writing.

Using these underlying assumptions I identify individual elements—signs, symbols, and hieroglyphs. Once identified I place the identifying properties within the larger contexts of pictorial program, text, category (e.g. day sign, toponym, etc.), geographic and temporal placement, as well as the broader scheme of comparative cultural relationships. Thus applied, I offer a preliminary compendium of visual signs from ancient Veracruz.

This treatise is not meant to be a linguistic decipherment. It is merely in-depth observation and discovery—the transmission of my drawings and the ideas embodied in the rich language of mental pictures made manifest in the cumbersome imprecision of written language.

Chapter Three
Special Considerations: Dating, Ethnicity, Provenience, Continuity and Disjunction

In Southeastern Mesoamerica we see a new semi-cohesive glyphic and iconographic program during the Terminal Classic period (c. C.E. 800-1000). The signs and symbols of the system represent a demographic and economic shift in the years following the fall of Classic centers in both Central Mexico and the Maya lowlands. Yet when precisely did this shift take place? Where? Who were the players involved in the transition? How and why did it take place?

Answers to these questions hinge on a clear understanding of dating and chronology, ethnicity, provenience, and the ability to discern continuity of meaning only where appropriate. By necessity this investigation incorporates a synthesis of archaeological research and data, and represents a broad spectrum in both space and time. Such a synthesis has inherent problems, especially at this writing. Dates for many key sites are currently under revision; others are hotly debated. Ethnicity is not clearly delineated. Additionally, several artifacts included in this study lack provenience, but provide hieroglyphic information worthy of discussion. This obviously raises ethical considerations, as well as problematic context. Lastly, the visual vocabulary incorporated in this study spans the boundaries of several cultures and time periods; therefore, some mention of the relative roles of symbolic continuity and disjunction is in order. The

implication of these considerations, coupled with the vast quantity of data, is nothing less than daunting

DATING AND ETHNICITY

Even before arriving at archaeological sites in the foreground of this study—actual locations of symbols and hieroglyphs—I want to address the greater temporal and geographic matrix of ancient Mesoamerica. Ramifications are twofold: First, controversies dealing with time frames and ethnic designations are not particular to the Gulf Coast and related cultures of the Terminal Classic. They are pervasive in Mesoamerican scholarship. Secondly, accurate dating of antecedent cultures holds important implications for interpreting the significance of developments manifest in the hieroglyphic and symbolic information contained in this thesis.

Most immediate is the issue of Teotihuacan. No one knows the ethnicity or the language spoken by inhabitants of Mesoamerica's preeminent Classic city. Recent archaeology indicates that the fall of Teotihuacan was far earlier than previously believed. Earlier archaeological interpretations, contingent on a later ending date for Teotihuacan's cultural horizon, saw other Classic centers—Maya sites in particular-- falling like dominoes in the wake of the city's demise. Yet, new data suggests that major lowland Maya centers persevered and even thrived following the end of Teotihuacan's hegemony.

The chart below offers a revised chronological sequence for ancient Mesoamerica in the years between C.E. 500-1200.

	Central Mexico	Oaxaca	Gulf Coast	Maya Highlands & Pacific	Maya Central Lowlands	Maya Northern Lowlands
1100-1200	Tula	Mixtec Independent Kingdoms	Cempoala			Mayapan
1000-1100	Tula		Fall of El Tajin			End of Chichen Itza
900-1000						
830-900			El Tajin	Cotzumalhuapa	Seibal	Chichen Itza
700-830	Cacaxtla Xochicalco				Classic Maya Decline	
600-700		Monte Alban IIIb				
500-600	Teotihuacan IV		Cerro de Las Mesas	Kaminaljuyu Escuintla		

Table 3.1 Chronology of Mesoamerican Civilization C.E. 500-1200

Generally accepted designations of ethnicity appear in Figure 3.1. Where populations are unknown or the subject of debate, I offer further examination only where such assignations are pertinent to the content and objectives of this thesis. Ensuing discussions on the chronological sequence and ethnic makeup of El Tajin, Chichen Itza, Seibal, and Cotzumalhuapa aid us in understanding the shifting organizations of peoples and interactions in the years following the Classic period collapse.

Map of ethnic designation

El Tajin

El Tajin (Figure 3.2) is practically synonymous with Veracruz archaeology, and in particular Classic Period Veracruz. Outside interest in the site dates back to the Late 18th Century. In 1785 Diego Ruiz, an officer of New Spain's tobacco industry first published drawings of the Pyramid of the Niches in the *Gazeta de Mexico* (Wilkerson 1987:12-13). Several European travel-adventurers visited Tajin in the early 19th Century, but it was German architect Charles Nebel whose observations garnered the most attentions. Nebel visited the region in 1829 and again in 1834. Two years later he published his drawings of the site in *Voyage Pittoresque.*. Nebel suggested that the Pyramid of the Niches was part of a "hidden city" (Wilkerson:14; Ladron de Guevara 1999:123).

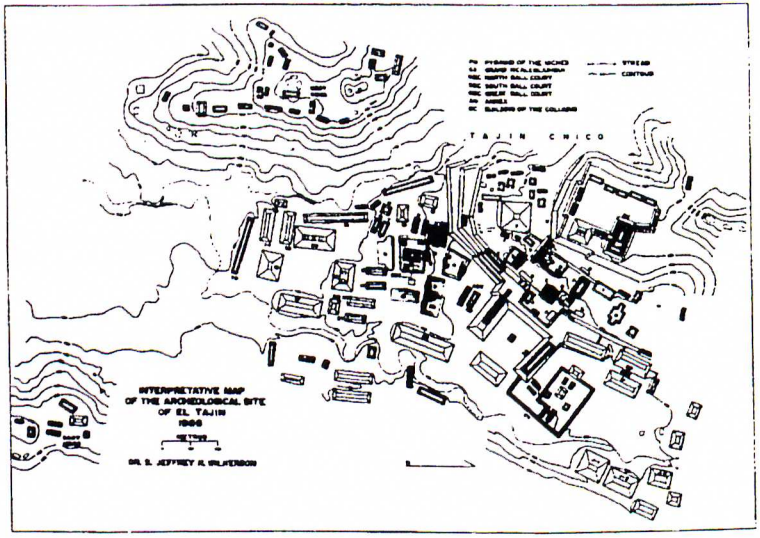


Figure 3.2 Site map of El Tajin. from Wilkerson

Archaeologists arrived making preliminary observations in the early 20th Century. These included such prominent Mesoamerican scholars as Teobert Maler, Edward Seler, Francisco del Paso y Troncoso, Herbert and Ellen Spinden, and Herbert Meyer (Wilkerson 1987:14; Ladron de Guevara 1999: 123-124). Yet, it was not until the late 1930's that extensive clearing and mapping took place at Tajin, under the direction of engineer Agustin Garcia Vega (Wilkerson 1987: 15). Garcia Vega uncovered a total of 77 acres that came to be known as the "Archaeological City of Tajin." (Ibid.). During this same period, starting in 1938, excavation and reconstruction began under the direction of INAH Archaeologist Jose Garcia Payon. Garcia Payon was to spend the next forty years of his life uncovering Tajin's monuments and structures (Wilkerson 1980: 204 and 213). Despite these efforts, at the time of Garcia Payon's death in 1977 nine-tenths of the site still lay unexcavated (Wyllie 1992:18). Tajin's sculptures, although published by Michael Kampen and others, cluttered the provisional museum, little more than the dusty warehouse of a backwater archaeological site.

An influx of money from the Mexican National petroleum company, Pemex, fueled (literally) Project Tajin (1984-1992) mass-scale excavations and reconstruction under the direction of German-born Mexican archaeologist Juergen K. Brueggemann (Ladron de Guevara 1999:126-127). The transformation of the archaeological zone, including construction of a world-class museum, was nothing short of remarkable.

The ambitious efforts undertaken by Garcia Payon and Bruggemann, respectively, produced markedly different findings and interpretations. Among these are the dates attributed to the site. Accurate dating is key to any reconstruction of both the setting and interrelationships surrounding Tajin hieroglyphs and symbolic currency—not only within

the context of the site's internal chronology, but also its place within the interaction spheres of Veracruz and greater Mesoamerica.

Garcia Payon (as illustrated in Wilkerson's chronology of architectural sequence below) saw Tajin as a continuously flourishing city from the Mesoamerican Early Classic period into the Early Postclassic phase. According to Garcia Payon, several of the buildings, such as the Pyramid of the Niches, contained earlier substructures, in a method of sequential constructional phases common throughout Mesoamerica (Garcia Payon 1971; Wilkerson 1987; Hunter 1987). By contrast Bruggemann (1991) dates El Tajin to a later, more condensed time frame (A.D. 850-1150), making it essentially a Terminal Classic site. What Garcia Payon saw as substructures when tunneling through the Pyramid of the Niches, Bruggemann describes as construction features resulting from the continuous extension of each *tablero* to ground level (Bruggemann: personal communication).

Differences in Chronology		
	Garcia Payon / Wilkerson	**Bruggemann / Proyecto Tajin**
Dates	1stC. – 1100 A.D.	800 – 1200 A.D.
Duration	1100 years late Preclassic - Postclassic	300 – 350 years late Classic – Postclassic
Niches Dates	6^{th} C. early over 4^{th} C. platform	11^{th} – 12^{th} C. late single stage
Great X. Dates	6^{th} C. early	11^{th} – 12^{th} C. late
Bldg 3	early	late
Bldg 23	late	early

Table 3.2 After Patricia Sarro 1995

Ceramic typologies add to the discussion. Lydia Raesfeld (1990: 92-95) examined ceramic fill from test pits in six of Tajin's ballcourts. Using a sample of 3500 fill sherds Raesfeld determined that each of the ballcourts had much the same composition. The fill and surface material suggested that the courts were all constructed

over a short time period. Additionally, the ballcourt fill contained a mixture of ceramic types previously used to distinguish between Late Classic and Early Postclassic wares (Ibid; Koontz 1994:12). Raesfeld's findings appear to support Bruggemann's notion of Tajin as a Terminal Classic site.

Veracruz ceramicist Yamile Lira Lopez also sees Tajin as late, noting little chronological development in the ceramic sequence (Koontz 1994:13). Lira Lopez uses radiocarbon dates of 887 and 964 in support of El Tajin's Terminal Classic building explosion (Ibid).

At a recent symposium—*Classic Veracruz Revisited*-- during the Society for American Archaeology annual meetings, it was evident that there is no consensus on the time range for Tajin. While many scholars acknowledge that the apogee of Tajin's power and influence was during the Terminal Classic, many think that a date of 1100 for the abandonment of that site is too late, and that there may have been a more gradual development than is postulated by Bruggemann.

Despite differences, both Garcia Payon and Bruggemann's chronologies place construction of the South Ballcourt and the Mound of the Building Columns in the A.D. 850-1000 time frame. Relative to Tajin hieroglyphs and associated iconography, the two most important narrative frieze programs in the city can thus be dated to the Terminal Classic Period. Stylistically this designation seems consistent with Terminal Classic iconography elsewhere in southeastern Mesoamerica. These correspondences will be discussed in greater detail in the forthcoming chapters. In the meantime, we confine ourselves to two important observations. First, ballgame decapitation rituals depicted on Tajin South Ballcourt panels conform with similar Terminal Classic iconography from

Chichen Itza, Cotzmalhuapa, and the Mixtequilla of southern Veracruz. Secondly, square cartouche day signs accompanied by bar and dot numerals, carved on the Mound of the Building Columns, are also found in other Terminal Classic contexts—again from the Mixtequilla, as well as numerous sites in the Lowland Maya region, from Seibal in the Petexbatun of Guatemala to coastal El Salvador.

Hieroglyphs lead us to the other key question in Tajin archaeology: ethnicity. Who populated El Tajin? This question has been approached by a variety of means including use of ceramic typologies, glottochronology (or lexicostatistical dating), ethnohistory, and even skeletal studies.

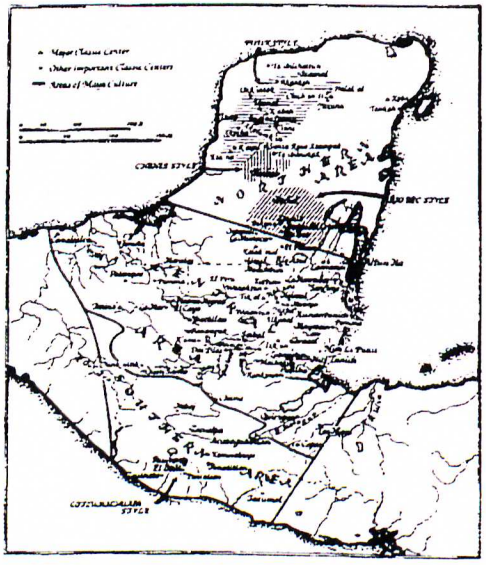
The Totonac currently inhabit El Tajin and the adjacent Papantla hills of north central Veracruz. They speak Zacatlan, one of three dialects of the Totonac language that also includes Munixcan (a northern variety) and Misantla (Aschmann and Wonderly 1952:121; Harvey and Kelly 1971:640-641). The Totonac claim that El Tajin was built during the time of their "grandfathers" (Wilkerson 1980:124), yet most scholars now think that the distinction of building Tajin belongs to the Huastec, who now inhabit the region north of El Tajin. Ethnohistoric data from 16th Century sources show both groups in the area at the time of the Conquest (Laughlin 1971: 299; Harvey and Kelly 1971: 639).

Both the Totonac and Huastec languages are members of the Macro-Maya language phylum (Aschmann and Wonderly 1952: 121). Huastec is one of 34 languages comprising the Mayan Language family. The two Huastecan dialects are Veracruzano (spoken in the state of Veracruz) and Potosi (Aschmann and Wonderly 1952: 121;

Laughlin 1971:299). Huastecan language is thought to have separated from the core group of Mayan languages sometime around 900 B.C. (Coe 1984:20).

Linguists John Justeson and Terrance Kaufman support the position that Tajin was a Huastec rather than Totonac site (Justeson and Kaufman: personal communication), a position widely held by archaeologists. As early as the late 1930's Wilfredo Du Solier argued that Tajin was ethnically Huastec, since it lacked Isla de Sacrificios ware, a ceramic type diagnostic of Totonac culture (Koontz 1994:10; DuSolier 1939, and 1945:187). Conversely, he noted a correspondence between Tajin Black ware ceramics and Huastec ceramics from Panuco III . Paula Krotser, working in the 1970's expanded DuSolier's typology, but linked Tajin ceramics to both Huastec and Totonac spheres (Koontz 1994:10 [Krotser and Krotser 1973]).

The Maya Region



In the Maya region, the Terminal Classic period (C.E. 800-925) heralds the end of an old political order. Vast migrations take place in the wake of the Maya collapse. At Chichen Itza, Seibal, and Cotzumalhuapa we find evidence of newly consolidated power. Articulated through fresh symbolic currency, political authority incorporates a preponderance of "foreign" iconography and hieroglyphs. Chichen (in northern Yucatan), Seibal (in the Petexbatun), and Cotzumalhuapa (on the Pacific coastal plain) each use distinct manifestations of this newly emerging visual vocabulary. Non-Maya elements spawn ongoing debates on the nature of outside influence and the nationality of new players in the political arena.

Chichen Itza

New archaeological findings place major occupation at Chichen Itza in the Terminal Classic period (Miller 1999: 62). Coupled with revised dating from El Tajin, both sites are now thought to be roughly contemporaneous. These correspondent dates offer more secure relationships between iconographic programs on ballcourt panels found at both places. As discussed more fully in Chapter 13, ballgame decapitation rituals link not only Chichen and El Tajin, but also the intermediate areas of the Mixtequilla.

Apart from hieroglyphs found on gold disks from the Sacred Cenote, there is little glyphic evidence linking Chichen Itza with El Tajin or any other regions of Veracruz. Connections lay in shared themes. Pabellon molded-carved ceramics, found at other Maya sites in this time period, are notably absent at Chichen (Schmidt: personal communication). This absence is perplexing. Yet it seems to suggest that prestige attributed to these goods held no sway in the internally secure power base of the Terminal Classic period's largest city.

Ethnicity at Chichen is another problem altogether, and at the heart of a chicken-egg debate on its relationship with Tula, Hidalgo in Central Mexico. Since architectural features at both sites strongly resemble one another, some archaeologists suggest that Chichen Itza was the outpost of a greater Toltec mercantile empire, centered in the Valley of Mexico. Other scholars counter that because Chichen was several times larger than Tula, given a symbiotic relationship, the latter was more likely a colony of Chichen. What *is* apparent is that Chichen Itza has several distinct architectural styles. Once thought to be evidence for sequential stages of occupation by distinct ethnic groups, archaeologists working at Chichen now believe that Puuk and Toltec style structures are contemporaneous. Chronology notwithstanding, this still leaves the question of the ethnicity of Chichen's inhabitants.

On this point there are no end of cultural reconstructions explaining the plethora of so-called "Mexican" traits. Ruling power at Chichen Itza has alternatively been attributed to the Toltec, under the auspices of their cult leader Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, the Itza (Ball and Taschek 1989; Kowalski 1989), and Eric Thompson's enigmatic Putun (Coe 1999:161; 165-169; 178-180; Miller 1999:62). Nevertheless, we see a firm, decidedly Maya, thread weaving through the eclectic mix of style, iconography, and symbolism at Chichen. Perhaps it was merely an "international" city, attracting outsiders as a pilgrimage site or by its affluence and power.

Seibal

Seibal is yet another Maya site with a distinctly foreign flavor. Like Chichen, ethnicity at Seibal has never been firmly established. Candidates for Seibal's allegedly

"Mexicanized Maya" include the Chontal Maya, Putun, Olmeca-Xicallanca (Adams 1991):262), or people of Acalan (Coe 1999:154-155; Ball and Taschek 1989; Ringle, et al.). Non-Maya traits giving rise to these hypotheses manifest themselves in iconography and hieroglyphs found on stelae (Graham 1971a; 1971b; 1990), and on molded-carved Fine Orange ceramics (Sabloff and Willey 1967).

Skeletal analysis seems to reinforce the validity of Seibal as overtaken by outsiders in or about the year C.E. 830. Referred to as the Bayal Phase (C.E. 830-930) at Seibal, the Terminal Classic sees changes in burial practices, burial population, and personal characteristics (Tourtellot 1990:133). Gair Tourtellot, who analyzed burials for the Seibal excavation believes that burial evidence alone supports a major population shift during the Bayal Phase. He builds his hypothesis on eight points (in descending order of importance), reprinted below:

1. "An apparent increase in physical stature for both males and females.
2. New childrearing practices reflected in the possibly first appearance of skull deformation in the Classic Period here [Seibal], and its new prevalence among males and females alike, implying a new group of women (mothers).
3. The appearance of Tabular Erect skull deformation, a pattern most characteristic of the intrusive Jimba phase males at nearby Altar de Sacrificios.
4. The total cessation of dental mutilation, whether filing or inlaying, modifications formerly practiced by males at all levels of society as expressed in the Tepejilote burials [*ca.* C.E. 650-830].

5. Extended burials as a dominant, perhaps entirely new, practice, replacing formerly uniform flexure (often on the right side) with a more eclectic mix of burial forms, including seated and secondary.
6. More consistent orientation of bodies, particularly adults, almost exclusively to the east, in contrast to the earlier balance with north orientation.
7. First positive evidence of dedicatory and axial burials in construction, some of which may have consisted of deliberately sacrificed individuals.
8. First evidence of burials in structures, whether dedicatory or not. This new practices sometimes also involved the erection of new classes of structures, domestic altars or shrines or public ceremonial platforms." (Tourtellot 1990:139).

Despite claims by Sabloff, Tourtellot, and others, not all scholars see Seibal under the domination of ethic outsiders. For example, while John Graham interprets physiognomy depicted on Seibal stelae as representing "non-Classic" features or foreign traits, David Stuart (Stuart 1993) rejects this interpretation on both iconographic and epigraphic grounds seeing "ceremonial costume and iconographic details of these monuments..firmly rooted in the greater Classic tradition" (Stuart 1993:337). He goes on to write—

> "As for the Seibal inscriptions as a whole, there is absolutely no evidence for the presence of non-Maya terminology. The texts are well within the Peten mode of recording period endings and associated rituals.....In the late records that do exist, we can see a strong continuation of Classic traditional and ritual practice." (p. 339)

The "Foreign Invasion Hypothesis" (Thompson 1970) no longer remains the popular explanation for the Classic Maya collapse. As attentions shift to alternate factors such as overpopulation, an overtaxed ecosystem, endemic warfare, and drought (Coe

1999:152), certain scholars (Schele and Mathews 1998) reject a foreign presence altogether—as the pendulum shifts widely in the opposite direction.

Cotzumalhuapa

Hieroglyphs at Terminal Classic Cotzumalhuapa are markedly different from those in Veracruz or the non-Maya calendric signs found on stelae and ceramics from the Pasion region. Despite this fact, Cotzumalhuapa hieroglyphs are distinctly non-Maya in structure and content (see Chapter 7, and Coe 1999:164). Cotzumalhuapa deserves attention specifically because its iconography and religion are so closely linked to the Gulf Coast. Relief carvings focus on the rubber ballgame. Serpents rise from the decapitated torsos of ball players wearing yokes and hachas. Stone yokes and hachas--Veracruz-associated ballgame articles-- occur abundantly in the Cotzumalhuapa zone and throughout much of Pacific coastal Guatemala (Coe 1999:163; Shook and Marquis 1996).

Sculpture-in-the-round and relief carvings at Cotzmalhuapa depict a pantheon of deities. Many of these gods, identifiable as Xipe Totec, Ehecatl, Huehueteotl, and the Feathered Serpent (Coe 1999:164), originate in Veracruz, while others, such as Tlaloc, are actively incorporated into Late Classic Gulf Coast religion and iconography.

While iconography and material culture suggest links with Veracruz, the ethnicity of the Cotzmalhuapans remains unknown. Michael Coe (1999:161 and164) suggests that the creators of Cotzumalhuapa were Pipil, Nahual-speakers inhabiting the Piedmont zone just north of the Pacific plain of Guatemala at the time of the Spanish conquest, yet he

acknowledges a clear relationship between Cotzmalhuapan civilization and ancient Veracruz. He writes—

> "There are suggestive connections with the Gulf Coast plain, where there is similar concentration upon the ballgame, death, human sacrifice, and the cultivation of cacao. If these were the Pipil, then there might have been an ancient center of Nahuat speakers in southern Veracruz who, as another *pochteca* group, could have invaded the southern Maya area across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec."

Widespread population movements characterize the tumultuous years between C.E. 800 and 925 (Coe 1999), making it all the more difficult to identify the originators of these seemingly "foreign" traits. Finally, we must bear in mind the differences between the myriad designations of "nation," "ethnicity," "style," "language," and "script." Scripts spread, crossing vast linguistic boundaries, even as language transcends delineations of ethnicity. Therefore, the spread of a script does not necessarily indicate the arrival of a new people.

PROVENIENCE

Whenever possible, I use examples of hieroglyphs and related iconography taken from artifacts with secure archaeological contexts. However, I include several bowls, vases, ballgame paraphenalia, and other materials with unknown provenience. These artifacts are currently in museums and private collections; many invariably procured through illicit means. The ethical dilemma is obvious; discussed at length in other venues.

Obtaining reliable dates from excavated materials is often difficult. Dates are reassessed over time as new findings and technologies transform our understanding of ancient cultural materials. Yet, careful excavations provide data anchoring an object in

time and space. The artifact effectively becomes cultural-historical documentation.. This is ordinarily not true of artifacts lacking archaeological provenience. At best they provide us with general insights, but little in the way of specific information.

Advanced technologies, such as chemical analysis, potentially transform the information that can be gleaned from such materials. Yet, even without such analyses, objects with hieroglyphic imagery contain valuable sources of textual information. Without the inclusion of these texts we lose a valuable source of historic documentation, regardless of their method of their procurement. This is particularly true where vessels offer complete, rather than partial inscriptions.

Recent studies of Maya painted polychrome vessels confront similar ethical issues. How do we weigh the wide scale looting of archaeological sites in relation to the potential for significant intellectual contributions that these items provide to cultural historians?. The choice is neither easy nor straightforward.

CONTINUITY AND DISJUNCTION

The signs, symbols, and hieroglyphs present in the Veracruz during the Late Classic to Early Postclassic transition commonly share forms and features with hieroglyphs, signs, and symbols elsewhere in Mesoamerica—in different times and in different places. This brings to light a crucial question in the analysis of Mesoamerican symbolism: does continuation of form (or style) constitute continuity of meaning?

Art historian George Kubler (1961; 1962) was the first in the field of Mesoamerican scholarship to address this question. Kubler applied Panofsky's Principle of Disjunction (essentially stating that scholars should not assume continuity of meaning

in similar forms of art which span time and place) in examining the relationship between art and symbolism before and after the Conquest. Symbols, according to Kubler, change meaning over time and distance, and cultures are shaped and re-shaped through contact. Kubler's argument, like Focillon (1939) and Panofsky (1944), favored an *a priori* assumption of disjunction over continuity. Kent Flannery and Joyce Marcus in their analysis of Zapotec Religion side with Kubler, and suggest alternative means by which one can derive meanings from the archaeological record (such as architectural patterns or the use of ritual space).

Karl Taube, on the other hand, in rather Covarrubian fashion extends the role of Mesoamerican maize deities through time and space, offering the viewer a kind of visual typology. Taube bases much of his interpretation on iconographic elements and seems to subscribe to pan-Mesoamerican cosmological symbolism; a similar position to that held by the late Linda Schele and others.

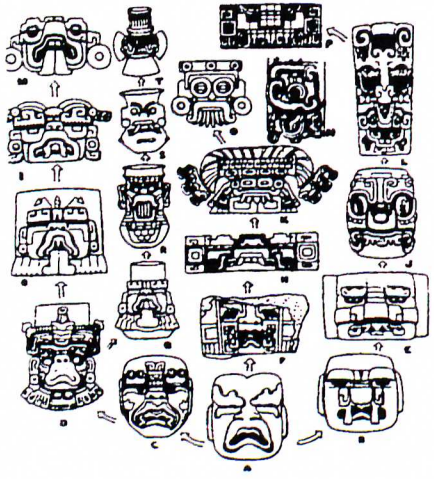


Figure 3.4 Relationship between Mesoamerican rain deities by Miquel Covarrubias (Miller and Taube)

Andean scholars Richard Burger and Jeffrey Quilter (1996) hold a tempered consensus between these two apparent extremes. As Quilter writes on continuity and disjunction (and I am inclined to agree), "we must presume neither and explore both" (Quilter 1996:315).

Quilter's approach is particularly applicable in developing an understanding of Veracruz-generated hieroglyphs and iconography. Merely plowing through the iconography to weed out symbols and images familiar from other cultural contexts robs us of any clear insights into how the elements and relationships of Veracruz iconography operate in their own setting. Unfortunately, this mix-and-match approach is all too common in Mesoamerican studies. Consequently, ancient Classic Veracruz is seldom viewed in its own right; rather, it remains ancillary to studies of other cultural areas.

Using a cognitive approach to Structural Analysis—with its aims on testability—we can apply a critical eye towards discerning continuity. Employing the methodological framework presented in Chapter 2, I use the following sequence to establish relative autonomy and interconnection:

1. Identify individual elements (such as icons, symbols, hieroglyphs).
2. Observe how these elements work in concert within the format of the artifact or picture plane.
3. Compare and contrast ways that elements and relationships in one format (as contained in point #2) relate to other formats within that same culture (and here the relative descending order of importance should be: 1: within the same site, 2: within the same region, 3: within the same culture).

4. Finally, contrast ways in which the extended elements and relationships above compare with elements and relationships in other cultures at a similar time period.

The preceding contains the *modus operandi* used in this thesis. Part Three contains the application of this method to hieroglyphs and related signs and symbols. Chapter 7 in this section offers a context for examining Veracruz writing, by helping to identify the properties and structures of other Mesoamerican writing systems. Part Four explores iconographic relationships.

PART TWO

Material Sources of Information

Introduction

Artifacts and architectural features considered in this study contain hieroglyphs or symbolic information *diagnostic of or relating to* Veracruz writing and visual vocabulary. I focus greatest attention on those objects and features incorporating hieroglyphs. These hieroglyphs form the basis for the corpus of symbols and text contained in the appendix. I explore diagnostic attributes of Veracruz writing in the chapters 7-12. So defined, evidence of this hieroglyphic system appears most frequently on:

1. Non-ceramic portable objects including carved pyrite mirror backs, ballgame paraphernalia, and gold and copper disks.
2. Relief carving on architectural features and monumental sculpture.
3. Molded and carved fine-paste ceramics.

This section examines the location and distribution of architecture and artifacts considered for this thesis. I also discuss source material and mode of production of portable objects; specifically, Rio Blanco and Pabellon molded-carved fine paste ceramics.

During my research I examined at all varieties of objects, since I could not be certain where I might find evidence of the hieroglyphs in question. Unlike Maya hieroglyphs, I found no evidence indicating that Veracruz hieroglyphs were ever painted. With perhaps one possible exception, no examples of the glyphs forming the basis of this study survive on painted ceramics, wall paintings, lienzos, or manuscripts. The relevance of this observation is two-fold: first, painting on perishable materials rarely survives in the

archaeological record, yet we cannot assume that these categories of objects never existed. Secondly, the exclusive survival of these hieroglyphs as relief carvings rather than in the form of paintings suggests an aesthetic preference for the medium of carving over that of painting, particularly in the transmission of writing and symbolic information. I wish to explore both ideas—perishable objects and the preference for relief carving—more fully before continuing on to survey artifacts containing Veracruz-related hieroglyphs.

Perishable Materials

Evidence suggests that the ancient people of the Gulf Coast possessed paper books, as well as documents painted on cloth, more commonly known as *lienzos*. Bark paper beaters (Figure II.1) survive throughout the archaeological record in Veracruz, from the Formative Period until the time of the Spanish invasion. It could be argued that paper makers used such *planchas* or bark beaters in the preparation of paper ornaments as well as producing materials for manufacture of accordion-fold books; therefore bark paper beaters are not necessarily evidence for books.

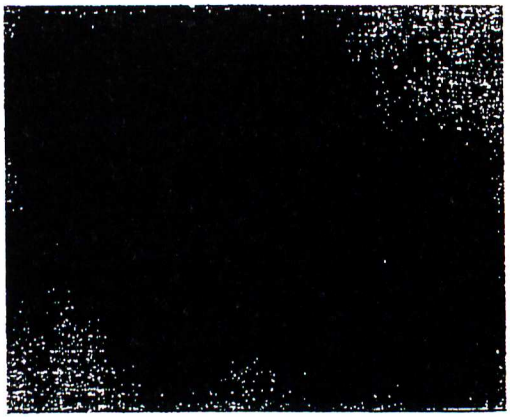
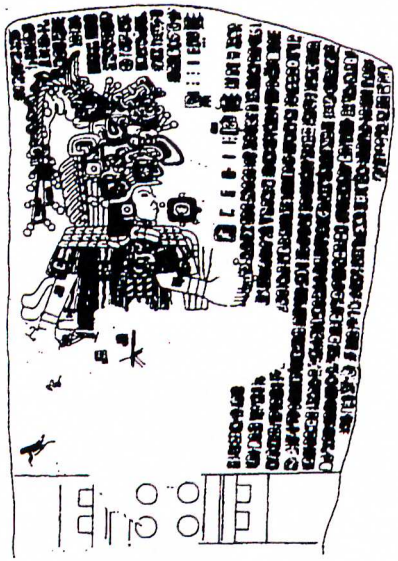


Figure II.1 (above) Bark paper beaters from Zempoala

In 1519, when Spanish invader Hernan Cortes arrives on the shores of Veracruz, Europeans come into contact for the first time with ancient Mesoamerican books and writing. In the vicinity of the Totonac site of Quiahuitztlan, Bernal Diaz del Castillo tells us of "*many of their paper books, which are folded as cloth as in Spain.*" And in his first shipment of native artifacts sent to Charles V, Cortes records including "*two books which the Indians have.*" These too were sent from Veracruz.



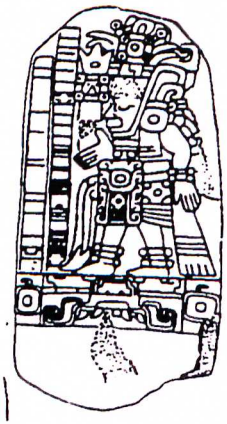


Figure II.2 Examples of writing in the ancient history of southern Veracruz: II.2a Late Formative, II.2b Middle Classic, II.2c Late Classic, II.d Postclassic.

Figure II.2a La Mojarra ST 1 (George Stuart)

Figure II.2b Cerro de las Mesas stela

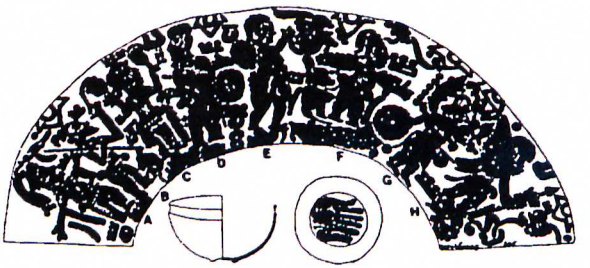


Figure II.2c Rio Blanco bowl with hieroglyphs (Hasso Von Winning 1996)

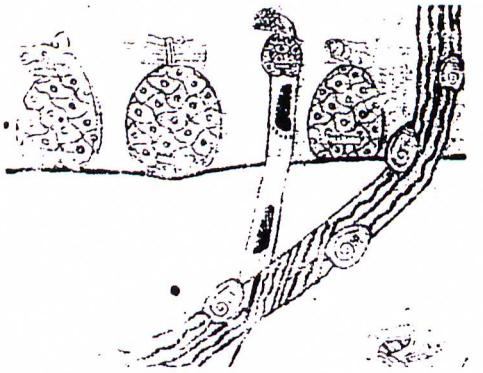


Figure II.2d Postclassic Tuxpan Lienzo

Scholars attribute these codices to the Aztecs, or even the Maya. Yet it is plausible, even probable, that such books were part of a well-established hieroglyphic writing tradition particular to Veracruz. As we learn in Chapters 7 and 8, *true writing* existed in ancient Veracruz as early as the Late Formative Period. This, in turn, probably developed out of the highly codified symbolic system of the ancient Olmec. Writing exists throughout much of the known ancient history of the Veracruz-Tabasco coastal plain and related Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Epi-Olmec writing records the earliest known

Mesoamerican dynastic history. Continuous texts of hieroglyphic information encode logo-syllabic symbols for Mixe-Zoquean language. These sequential hieroglyphic texts accompany portraits of early rulers in their finest regalia. From the first erection of these historic stelae celebrating dynastic rule in the early part of the first century C.E., portraits accompanying historic dates and events continue to represent political and religious authority until well into the Classic Period, as seen at Cerro de las Mesas. Later, as elsewhere in Mesoamerica, texts become abbreviated. This economy in the rendering of dates and events is a ubiquitous characteristic of much of Mesoamerica during the Terminal Classic period. There is an increased predilection towards narrative pictorial programs, augmented with a few strategically-placed hieroglyphic captions. In Veracruz we see this in scenes from relief carvings at El Tajin, and on fine paste molded-carved ceramics from the Mixtequilla. Eventually, at the onset of the Postclassic, a new visual symbolic vocabulary sweeps through all but the most staunchly conservative areas of ancient Mexico. Known as Mixteca-Puebla style, canons of depiction for both image and text, replace regional writing and artistic expressions. Evidence that this transition took hold in Veracruz can be seen by comparing hieroglyphic information on Postclassic Huastec and Totonac sculpture with that from earlier Terminal Classic El Tajin. The Tuxpan Lienzo, thought to predate Contact Period, exemplifies the incorporation of Postclassic Mixteca-Puebla style.

Therefore, considering information contained in the above overview, we know the following:

1. Veracruz has a long tradition of hieroglyphic logo-phonetic writing.

2. Bark paper beaters appear extensively in the Veracruz archaeological record both temporally and spatially.
3. Ethnohistoric documents record both native books and lienzos in Veracruz at the time of the Conquest.
4. The Late Postclassic Tuxpan Lienzo and other later Early Colonial Period codices in Veracruz provide supporting evidence of a well-established tradition of painted documents in the Gulf region.

In light of these findings it is reasonable to conclude that there is sufficient time-depth to Veracruz manuscript production. The absence of surviving folding screen paper or deer-skin manuscripts is consistent with a comparable lack of surviving books elsewhere in ancient Mesoamerica. Yet, it has been posited that the Classic Maya, Zapotecs, and even the elite of Teotihuacan possessed books, despite the fact that no artifactual remains support these claims. However lacking in material evidence, this appears to be a fair assumption. In Veracruz, a cultural region with a sustained literary tradition, we can easily imagine books in addition to elite proclamations in stone or the rhythm of narrative mythology encircling the surface of molded-carved bowls and vases.

Michael Coe (1984:87) feels that by the Classic period "literacy was...pan-Mexican." He writes—

> "although no books have survived from the Classic into our day, we have every reason to believe that most people posessed them. Dates were recorded in terms of the 52 year Calendar Round, and in the Gulf Coast lowlands the Long Count was used. What for, if not to write their own history?"

A Propensity For Sculptural Relief

Chapter 2 explored the fundamental interplay of art and writing in ancient hieroglyphic writing systems including the etymology of terms for painting and writing, artist and scribe. Writing on the origins of writing, language professor Wayne Senner examines the derivation of words for writing relative to the motor action involved in the

incising or drawing of early scripts and notations. For example, in English "to write" apparently comes from the Old High German term *rizan*, meaning "to scatch" (Modern German *einritzen*, "to incise") (Senner 1989:4). This makes sense since the earliest form of Germanic writing was runes, notch-like incisions carved in wood and stone or incised in metal. "Rune" stems from the Indo-European root meaning "to scratch, dig, or make grooves" (ibid; and Antonsen 1989: 140). In the case of runes, the etymology is not merely metaphorical, since as German language scholar Elmer Antonsen (1989:144) notes "runic shapes avoid curves and horizontal lines, changing them to angles and oblique lines.....the result of...having been developed for carving in wood where it is difficult to execute curves and horizontal lines would tend to be obscured by the grain of the wood." On the other hand, the Gothic verb *meljan*, "to paint", also describes the act of writing (Senner 1989:4). Similarly, Chinese and Egyptian scripts reflect the amalgamation of writing and painting derived from the deft art of brush and ink (Ibid). We can divide Old World scripts between those that evolved from carving, and those more calligraphic traditions where writing most closely reflects the art of the brush. As is the case in Arabic calligraphy or Chinese brushstroke painting, the writing in turn profoundly influenced the development of the associated art.

The writing systems of ancient Mesoamerica developed along these same lines, in two apparently parallel trajectories, one associated with painting, the other with carving. Michael D. Coe and Justin Kerr explore this idea in *The Art of the Maya Scribe* (1998), comparing the early Isthmian or Epi-Olmec writing of Veracruz with the appearance and development of Maya writing—

"...the few known Isthmian texts are rendered in an incised, angular style reminiscent of the runic writing of northern Europe. Perhaps, like runic, the Isthmian script was first developed on wood rather than stone; in its aesthetic "feel" it is totally non-calligraphic, and certainly not influenced by the use of brush and pen so apparent in the Maya style. The art of Maya writing assuredly did not have Isthmian roots." (Coe and Kerr 1998:66).

The ancient Maya developed calligraphy to a high artform; the conceptual link embodied in the verb simultaneously meaning both "to write" and "to paint." The fluid, curvilinear brushstroke found its way onto bark paper books, wall paintings, and "codex-style" polychrome painted vases. Even the carved stone stelae, relief panels, and wooden lintels of the Classic Maya retain the spirit of their calligraphic origins.

The art and writing of ancient Veracruz developed on a separate path. Although the Maya and Mixe-Zoquean inhabitants of southern Veracruz were certainly in close contact, undoubtedly exposed to and influenced by one another's texts and forms of representation, each had a dominant cultural aesthetic, manifested in the form (and to some degree the function) of writing and art. As Coe and Kerr point out, Veracruz writing developed from carving, rather than painting.

Figure II.3 Maya calligraphy

On the Gulf Coast, writing and carving, are never entirely segregated. Certainly this is in part because carved stone survives in the archaeological record long after the disintegration of painted paper (or even wall paintings, for that matter). Yet, where we

have surviving examples of Classic Veracruz painting, such as at El Tajin, Las Higueras, and Vega de la Pena, hieroglyphs are entirely absent. We can compare this with the wall paintings of the Maya, Zapotec, Mixtec, and to a lesser degree Teotihuacan, where hieroglyphic symbols and texts are integrated within the pictorial programs.

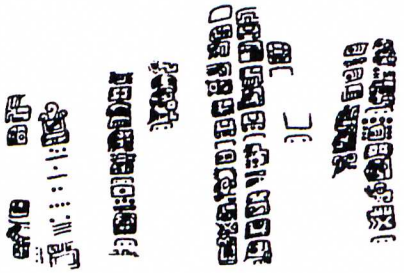


Figure II.4 Incised writing from the Tuxtla Statuette

The import of the word in ancient Veracruz appears to be principally reserved for the art of relief carving. We see this in the choice of locations and materials surveyed in the section below. All features and artifacts listed contain hieroglyphs diagnostic of the southern Veracruz Mixtequilla region regardless of their geographic distribution. The term "hieroglyph" in this context, thus refers to signs within this system, unless stated otherwise.

The following chapter covers non-ceramic portable artifacts: stone ballgame paraphernalia, gold disks, and pyrite mirror backs. In the sucessive two chapters I include monumental sculpture (Chapter 5) and ceramics (Chapter 6), respectively.

Chapter Four
Non-Ceramic Portable Objects

Few non-ceramic portable objects contain Veracruz hieroglyphs. Of the artifacts discussed in this chapter only the gold disks from the cenote at Chichen Itza have archaeological provenience. Tatiana Proskouriakoff cites ballgame yokes and palmas, as well as carved pyrite mirror backs in her *Varieties of Classic Central Veracruz Sculpture* (Proskouriakoff 1958). Such objects exemplify Classic Veracruz style—and in these instances combine object and style together with diagnostic hieroglyphs forming the topic of this study.

Stone Ballgame Paraphenalia

Only four carved stone objects associated with the Mesaomerican rubber ballgame are considered in this study—three palmas and a yoke. All four contain hieroglyphs—three with continuous texts. Although all reside in private collections, the origin of the yoke is known--found in road cut at the south entry to the town of Usulatan, in the Department of Usulutan, El Salvador (Shook and Marquis 1996). One of the palmas also comes from El Salvador, purportedly from Piedras Gordas in the Department of Chalatenago (ibid). The other two other palmas are believed to be from highland Guatemala (ibid) and Veracruz (Spinden 1928) respectively.

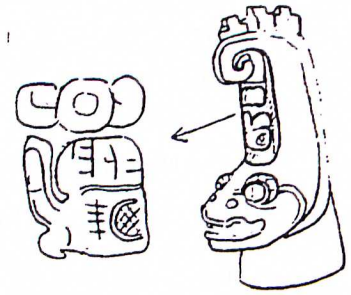


Figure 4.1 Yoke from Highland Guatemala
Cherra Wyllie (after Shook and Marquis 1996)

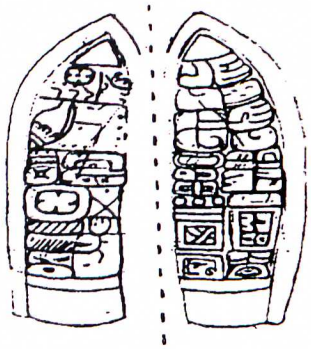


Figure 4.2 Palma, Piedras Gordas, El Salvador
Cherra Wyllie (after Shook and Marquis 1996)

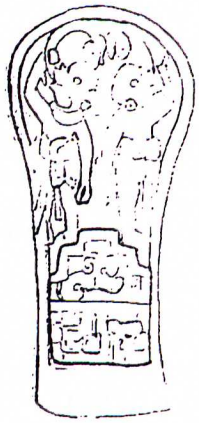


Figure 4.3 Palma Veracruz, Cherra Wyllie
After Spinden 1945

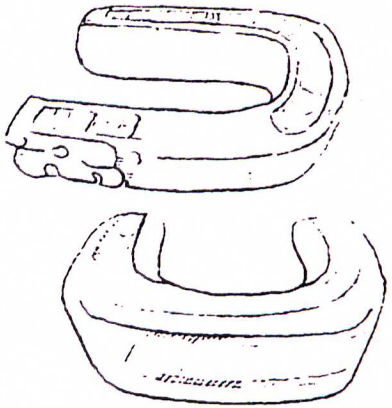


Figure 4.4 Yoke from Usulutan, El Salvador,
Cherra Wyllie (after Shook and Marquis 1996)

Writing of any type on stone ballgame material is extremely rare. The widespread distribution of Veracruz-associated hieroglyphs in conjunction with palmas and a yoke makes these artifacts all the more compelling. Curiously, we find both Rio Blanco and

Pabellon Molded-carved fine paste vessels in association with yokes and ballcourts (see Chapter 6). Rio Blanco and Pabellon wares bear Veracruz-associated hieroglyphs, including square-cartouche hieroglyphs, such as the ones on the El Salvador palma. These correspondences therefore link the Late Classic popularity of the rubber ballgame with both square-cartouche day signs and fine paste molded and carved ceramics.

Yokes and hachas occur concentrated in two principle geographic regions: Veracruz on the Gulf Coast, and in Western Honduras, El Salvador, and Pacific coastal Guatemala (Shook and Marquis 1996: 3 and 11). In intermediate areas the objects appear only sporadically. This is curious, since we might expect to see them in higher concentrations in Chiapas, Tabasco, and Campeche (ibid). Strangely, we find a similar absence of fine paste molded-carved ceramics in this same corridor—with two ceramic types, both indistinguishable at first glance, and both containing these unusual hieroglyphs—segregated by the intervening regions of Chiapas, Tabasco, and to a lesser degree Campeche.

Pyrite Mirror Backs

Pyrite mirrors with carved slate backing follow a similar distribution pattern to the yokes and palmas. We find them on the Gulf Coast concentrated in Veracruz and in the Pacific coastal areas of Guatemala and El Salvador. The mirror backs frequently contain interlocking scrolls and scantily clad figures rendered in pure Tajin style.

Although identified with Classic Veracruz style, artists also created carved or incised slate mirror backs using iconography of unmistakable Teotihuacan origin or

influence. In certain instances we find carved mirror backs with attributes linking them to *both* interaction-spheres. This combination of influences is germane to our discussion of hieroglyphs, since in his article on Teotihuacan writing Karl Taube (Taube 1999) uses a pyrite mirror back as an example of Teotihuacan linear text. In Chapter 11, I argue that while I accept Taube's premise that this is linear text, I believe it to be of Veracruz derivation. As with stone ballgame sculpture, few of these artifacts contain hieroglyphs, whether individual or sequential.

Figure 4.5 Pyrite mirror back from Taube 2001

Metals From the Cenote at Chichen Itza

The Cenote at Chichen Itza is a well created from a sinkhole. Such sinkholes are common within the limestone karst topography of northern Yucatan. The Maya and their neighbors used The Cenote of Sacrifice at Chichen Itza as a depository of sacrificial victims and offertory treasures (Coggins and Shane 1984). Archaeologists dredged material from the well between 1904 and 1907 (ibid), yet materials from these efforts were not published until some fifty years later (Lothrop 1952; Proskouriakoff 1974; Tozzer 1957).

Artifacts from the Cenote show widespread foreign influence or manufacture, and it is likely that the sacred well was a pilgrimage site during the Terminal Classic period.

Both the iconography and hieroglyphs suggest Chichen Itza's contact with the Toltecs, Cotzumalhuapa, and the Gulf Coast, as well as a plethora of artifacts that are purely "Classic Maya" in conception.

For the purpose of this study we will concern ourselves with three gold disks (Lothrop 1952) and two carved jades (Proskouriakoff 1974), all with non-Maya writing discussed in Chapter 9. The gold disks have iconographic elements connecting them with Early Classic Postclassic Central Mexico, and although the square cartouche hieroglyphs resemble examples from Veracruz and the Maya Pasion region during the Terminal Classic, the cultural derivation of these artifacts is not entirely clear.

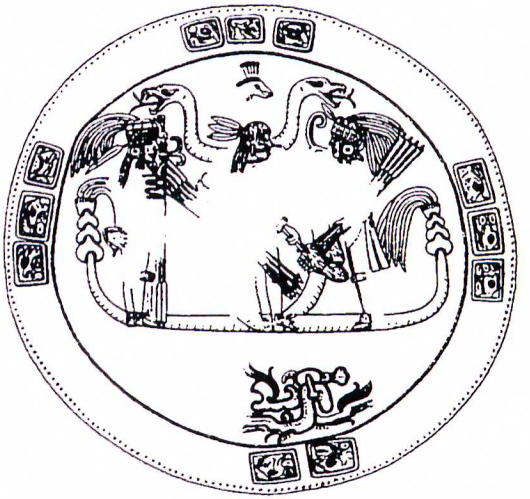


Figure 4.6 Gold Disk I, from Lothrop 1952

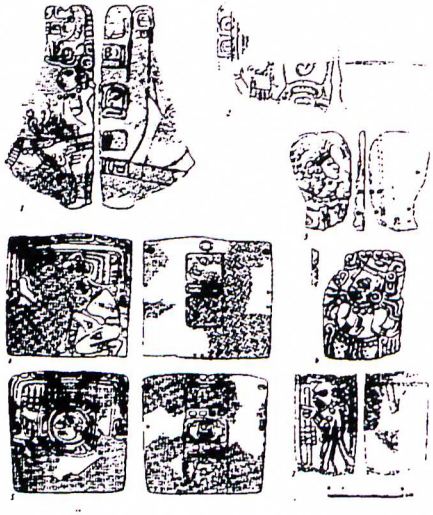


Figure 4.7 Carved jades from the cenote at Chichen Itza from Proskouriakoff 1958

Chapter Five
Sculpture

Late Classic Veracruz artists shift their energies away from producing the carved stelae so characteristic of Early Classic Cerro de las Mesas. Although southern Veracruz sculptors continue erecting monumental stone works at that site, artists in north-central Veracruz engage in creating pictorial programs actively incorporated into monumental architecture. Temples, palaces, playing fields, and civic buildings are the new venues for story telling articulated through painted murals and intricate relief carvings.

The sequential pictography at Las Higueras and El Tajin shows a conscious abandonment of writing as the preferred medium of narrative. It is unclear to what extent to which scribes continue producing written narrative in other media, such as screenfold books; unclear whether there is a cultural divide in such matters between the *literati* and the great unschooled masses. We are reminded of the grand Romanesque portals at Conques and Autun, where architectural features serve as didactic tools to wandering pilgrims, and image-based moral tales are rendered in a mutually intelligible language of pictures.

Perhaps the revolutionary change in visual communication is as much about a change in the intended audience as it is a signifier of altogether new populations. Portable objects with hieroglyphs and narrative pictography, like precious fine paste ceramics (Chapter 6), carved jade, gold disks, or stone ballgame trophies (Chapter 4) undoubtedly were treasured items owned by elite patrons. On the other hand, pictorial stories on

monumental buildings were far more public proclamations—whether viewed in interior passageways by visiting dignitaries or offering visual cues for the performance of ritual theater. Perhaps for these reasons language-based hieroglyphic texts disappear. Hieroglyphs are almost entirely absent in Veracruz architectural and monumental sculpture during the Late Classic-Early Postclassic transition, apart from intermittent calendric names labeling ritual actors or place names integrated within the setting of the action. The place names are so hidden as to be embedded. And mural paintings seem to lack hieroglyphs altogether.

Veracruz Architectural Sculpture

Known architectural features containing hieroglyphs occur exclusively at the site of El Tajin in north-central Veracruz. These include programs of narrative relief carvings from the Pyramid of the Niches and Central Plaza structures, the South Ballcourt panels, the North Ballcourt panels, and the Mound of the Building Columns.

El Tajin

El Tajin has a long history of iconographic research beginning with Ellen Spinden in 1933, who related Tajin narratives with Postclassic Central Mexican imagery and texts (Koontz 1994:4-5 [Spinden 1933]). Mexican archaeologist Garcia Payon continued to interpret Tajin iconography, and the South Ballcourt panels in particular, in relation to Central Mexican prototypes (ibid.).

David Tuggle published the first comprehensive analysis of the Mound of the Building Columns in 1968. This was followed by Michael Kampen's 1972 volume, *The Sculptures of El Tajin, Veracruz, Mexico*. Kampen's work stands apart in viewing Tajin

iconography in its own right, and not merely as an analogue to other Mesoamerican cultural areas. Kampen produced a carefully documented corpus of line drawings of all known sculpture at the site; extensively reproduced in subsequent discussions of Tajin iconography.

More recently, Arturo Pascual Soto (1990), S. Jeffery K. Wilkerson (1980, 1984; 1987;1991), Rex Koontz (1994), and Sara Ladron de Guevara (1999) offered iconographic interpretations of Tajin relief sculpture.

Despite sustained efforts to understand Tajin iconography, only minimal attention has been focused on the site's hieroglyphs. Wilfredo Du Solier recorded the presence of the 13 Rabbit glyph on Fine Relief Blackware pottery associated with the Mound of the Building Columns (1945:155-156). The 13 Rabbit glyph also features prominently on the north column of that structure. DuSolier interpreted 13 Rabbit as a date in the 260-day Mesoamerican calendar. H. David Tuggle later proposed the idea—now widely accepted—that hieroglyphs on features of the Mound of the Building Columns represented personal names rather than dates, serving as captions labeling individuals participating in the ritual narrative. He further posited that 13 Rabbit was a prominent El Tajin ruler (Tuggle 1968). The Mound of the Building Columns is now commonly thought to be 13 Rabbit's palace.

Iconographic studies by Kampen (1972), Wilkerson (1980; 1984; 1991), Pascual Soto (1990), Kootz (1994), and Ladron de Guevara (1999) note hieroglyphs only insofar as they relate to pictorial narrative. Arturo Pascual Soto while not specifically focusing *on hieroglyphs,* in his 1990 volume *Iconografía Arqueologia de El Tajin,* nevertheless

treats iconographic symbols *as hieroglyphs* (Koontz 1994: 7); even to the point of applying Sir Eric Thompson's notational system for Maya hieroglyphs (1962) to those elements (Ibid). Following the completion of his dissertation on El Tajin iconography, art historian Rex Koontz amassed known examples of Tajin hieroglyphs, creating a useful reference resource via the Internet. Koontz's web site is the first compilation of Tajin glyphs and related references.

There have been some efforts to place El Tajin hieroglyphs within larger regional context. Janet Berlo places Tajin glyphs with other examples of writing from Veracruz, including Piedra Labrada, Cerro de las Mesas, and Maltrata (Berlo 1989:42-43). Munro Edmunson (1992:157), for reasons not entirely clear to this author, lumps Huastec and Totonac writing systems and day signs in with "central and northern Anahuac," which includes central Mexican as well as Tarascan writing! Edmunson derives many of his Huastec calendric signs from El Tajin iconography, including copal bag motifs carried by figures on relief carvings from the Pyramid of the Niches.

Narrative Sculpture from the Central Plaza

Ceremonial space at El Tajin focuses on the Central Plaza, drawing our attentions to the Pyramid of the Niches—a structure that symbolizes, more than any other, ancient Classic Veracruz. The following relief carvings from the Pyramid of the Niches and surrounding Central Plaza buildings contain hieroglyphs, as well as other codified symbols relevant to this study: Pyramid of the Niches Structure 7 (referred to by Koontz as Structure Two Panel), Structure Four Panel, Pyramid of the Niches Panel 1, Pyramid of

the Niches Panel 5, Pyramid of the Niches Vertical Panels (Kampen's Catalogue Figures 10f and 10g), Pyramid of the Niches Horizontal Frieze Fragments (11g, 11i 11a, 11l, 12h), Pyramid of the Niches Sculptures 4-6 (18a), and Pyramid of the Niches Sculptural Fragment (19e).

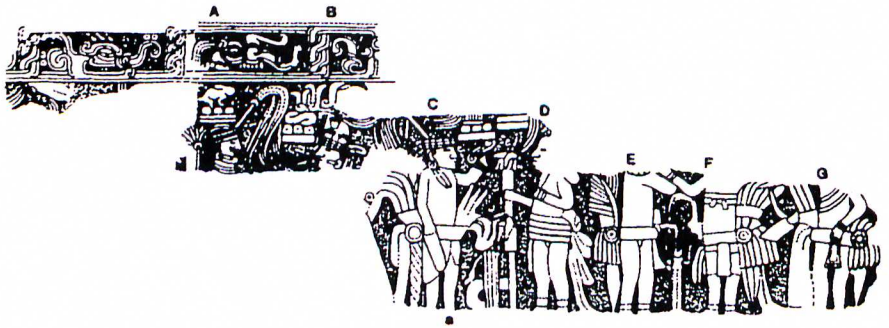


Figure 5.1 Scene from Mound of the Building Columns, El Tajin with the name for ruler 13 Rabbit, along with other hieroglyphs naming key players in the narrative (from Kampen 1972)

Ballcourt Panels

South Ballcourt Panels. The elaborate narrative program forming Tajin's South Ballcourt represent the most intensely analyzed of all examples of Classic Veracruz pictorial representation. Constructed of large sandstone blocks, the vertical walls of the ballcourt are dominated by Structures 5 and 6 on either side. The surrounding presence has the effect of heightening the flat, carved surfaces of the playing walls, and thus pulling the viewer into the sacred intimacy of the space. It thus becomes a metaphorical journey into the Underworld, through the portal of the ballcourt itself. Contemporary architect Maya Lin used a similar device to draw viewers into the complexity of the Vietnam War by luring them into a passage bounded by a long, high vertical wall.

While the Mound of the Building Columns contains toponyms, insignia, and other hieroglyphs, names and day signs are noticeably absent. Koontz (1994: 85) ponders this omission—

> "With one possible exception, no human actor in the South Ballcourt program is named glyphically. While it is clear that Mesoamerican artists could name historical figures outside of writing.....the lack of other diagnostic patterns in the depiction of the South Ballcourt personages, such as regalia or facial markings, make it difficult if not impossible to maintain specific identifications for any of the human protagonists."

Koontz goes on to compare this absence of identifying hieroglyphs with other narrative sequence programs at the site, such as the Mound of the Building Columns.

> "Given the current understanding of chronology of El Tajin, it is impossible to ascribe this fundamental difference in the treatment of narrative characters to an ignorance of writing during the building of the South Ballcourt. Until there is a firmer chronological differentiation between the South Ballcourt and the Mound of the Building Columns (if one does exist), the omission of names may be considered a choice on the part of the creators of the ballcourt program." (Koontz 1994:85-86).

The six panels form a narrative sequence, "read" in the absence of discernable hieroglyphs. Koontz sees this as an example of "fixed text" used to establish authority in ritual performance (Kootnz 1994:95). Both the story's reading order and content offer several interpretations. Koontz, for example, views the story as warfare ritual played out in the politically-charged arena of the ballcourt. Wilkerson (1980) on the other hand ties it to the mythology of the Popol Vuh, the creation story of the Postclassic Quiche Maya. All six panels of the El Tajin South Ballcourt reside *in situ*.

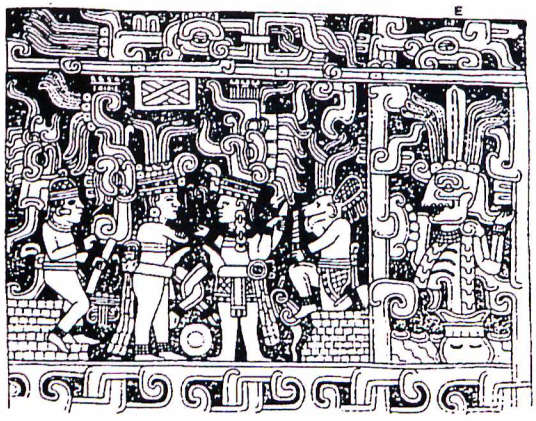


Figure 5.2 Figure from El Tajin South Ballcourt from Kampen 1972.

Mound of the Building Columns

The Mound of the Building Columns sits on an acropolis overlooking the civic and ceremonial centers of the site. Using a natural promontory, ancient Tajin architects leveled the area, before constructing a 11,100 square meter courtyard and building complex (Koontz 1994: 108 [Garcia Payon 1954:40]). Across the courtyard from the main structure, five or six carved columns originally supported a portico above an entry stairway (Garcia Payon 1954:40; Tuggle 1968: 40; Kampen 1972: 12;Wilkerson 1991:52; Koontz 1994: 108). These columns each contain multiple tiers of historical narrative, circling the stacked drums of the pillars, carved *in situ*.

Any discussion of El Tajin hieroglyphs focuses on this narrative program. Alfonso Caso (1953: 342) first suggested that bar and dot numerals accompanying objects and animals identified characters in the scenes—a premise still generally accepted. The name glyph and identifying characteristics of 13 Rabbit recurs several times within the various

acts of the historical drama; consequently the Mound of the Building Columns palace complex is attributed to this key protagonist, believed to be an important Tajin ruler.

Michael Coe feels that the identifying hieroglyphs on the columns are significant, and "testify to the literacy of this civilization."

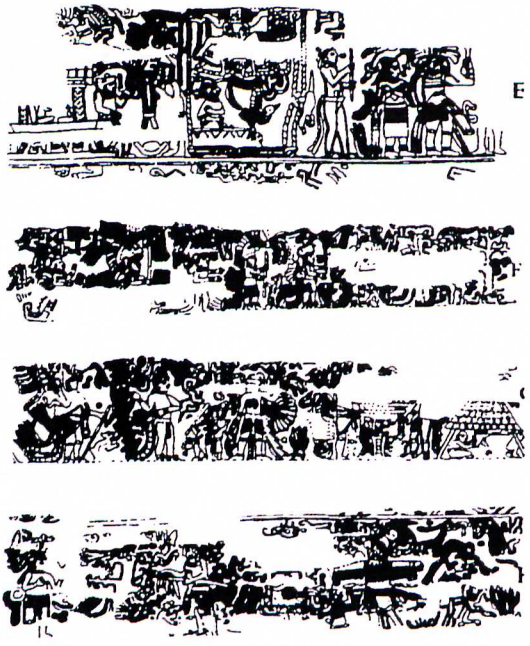


Figure 5.3 El Tajin Central Building Column draw by Sara Ladron Guevara

Monumental Freestanding Sculpture

Southern Veracruz

South of the modern city of Veracruz a geographic area extends from its northern boundaries along the Rio Blanco south to Lake Catemaco and the Tuxtlas Mountains. Sometimes known as the Mixtequilla-Papaloapan, this region contains a dense

concentration of hieroglyphic inscriptions. Southern Veracruz artisans produced carved stone stelae at Tres Zapotes, La Mojarra, and Cerro de las Mesas between the early First and Seventh centuries of the Common Era. These "Epi-Olmec" or Isthmian inscriptions are precursors to hieroglyphic symbols of the Late Classic period. Like the ancestral script, square cartouche Late Classic hieroglyphs appear on carved monumental sculpture at Cerro de las Mesas and on Rio Blanco pottery found at several sites within this same geographic region (see Chapter 6).

Archeological sites in the Mixtequilla and Tuxtlas Mountains region of southern Veracruz containing freestanding stone sculpture generally predate the Late Classic-Early Postclassic transition. Originally I excluded them in my discussions of stone sculpture. On further consideration I decided that it was impossible to seriously examine Veracruz hieroglyphs between C.E. 800-1000 without focusing on the trajectory of writing in this critical region. Although I address this topic in Chapters 7 and 8 and intended only to catalogue artifacts of later manufacture, I since decided to include earlier stelae. The central premise of this dissertation is that Gulf Coast traders disseminated southern Veracruz writing and symbolic currency in accordance with waxing mercantile power. Since (as I now assert) the writing system was firmly in place far in advance of the ascendancy of Veracruz "Pochtun," this sculpture provides essential material sources of information.

Late Preclassic Stelae

Mixe-Zoquean speaking descendants of the Olmec developed the tradition of erecting stone stelae recording dynastic history reflected in ruler portraits and Long Count

dates. Isthmian or Epi-Olmec writing, while firmly established in Veracruz, transcends the geographic boundaries of the Gulf Coast. Examples of stone sculpture containing this script include Stela 2 from Chiapa de Corzo (36 B.C.E.), the Tuxtla Statuette, Tres Zapotes Stela C (32 B.C.E.), and La Mojarra Stela 1 (157 C.E.). A related script stemming from the same common origins appears on the Pacific Coast and southern Highlands of current day Guatemala and Chiapas at Abaj Takalik, El Baul, and Kaminaljuyu—all containing Cycle 7 dates.

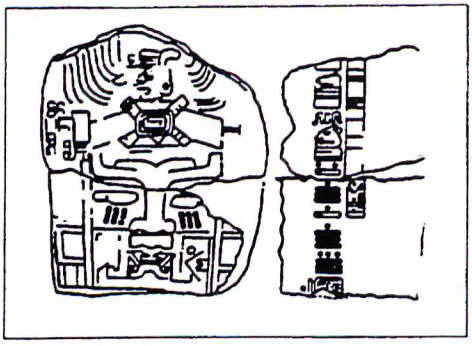


Figure 5.4 Tres Zapotes Stela C, from Coe

Classic Period Stelae

During the Classic Period the tradition of erecting stelae to glorify the exploits of kings survives solely at Cerro de las Mesas in the Mixtequilla. In all probability the practice of erecting these monuments was far more widespread than the scarcity of the objects suggests. Here we bemoan the comparative lack of excavation in this region.

Cerro de las Mesas

Cerro de las Mesas is especially important to our study, as the monumental sculpture shows a clear transition from linear text in association with ruler portraits and abbreviated Calendar Round dates that may in fact serve as nominative devices.

In 1927 Herbert Spinden published two drawings of Cerro de las Mesas sculpture, bringing the remote site to public attention (Miller 1991). Matthew Stirling and Philip Drucker conducted preliminary excavations during the early 1940's unearthing much of the monumental sculpture now residing in the Museum of Anthropology in Xalapa, Veracruz. Nevertheless, the archaeologists never established a reliable chronological sequence for the site. This left subsequent scholars with the onerous task of reconstructing Cerro de las Mesas history, as well as defining the external influences filtering through the region to form the site's diagnostic art style. Yet as art historian Mary Miller aptly states, the 1986 discovery of La Mojarra Stela 1 less that 30 km. Away confirm that Cerro de las Mesas formed part of "a greater Isthmian tradition" (Miller 1991). Justeson and Kauffman's recent decipherment of Epi-Olmec script places Cerro de las Mesas within a group of carved monuments and artifacts written in Epi-Olmec script that in turn encode Mixe-Zoquean language. Kauffman and Justeson largely confine their interests to inscriptions with Long Count dates including those on Stela 6 and Stela 8 (Justeson and Kaufman 2001; Kaufman and Justeson 2001).

Mary Miller wrestled with problems of chronology for Cerro de las Mesas sculpture (Miller 1991). Using joint venues of style and archaeological context Miller provides the following general sequence:

1. Protoclassic. Cache of Olmec jades (c. 800-400 B.C.E.), and a carved tortoise shell (the latter found in burial contexts).
2. Early Classic. Stela 6 (C.E. 468), Stela 8 (533), Stela 3, Stela 5, Stela 13, Stela 15, the San Miguel Chapultepec Stela, Monument 5, and Stela 9.
3. Late Classic. Stela 4, Stela 11, Monument 2.

I find Miller's sequence convincing (apart from Stela 15 which may in fact be later). Abbreviated hieroglyphic information goes hand in hand with a change in art style. The costume elements, manner of representation, rendering of hieroglyphs and overall iconographic program conform to Late Classic scenes on El Tajin architectural sculpture, as well as pictorial narrative found on Rio Blanco ceramics. These traits also identify southern Veracruz influence in outlying areas at the end of the Classic period.

Figure 5.5a

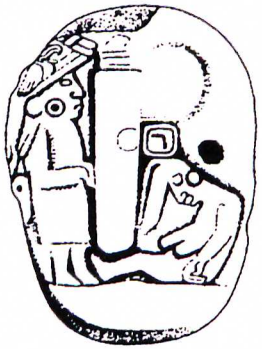


Figure 5.5b

Figure 5.5 Early Classic (5.5a) and Late Classic (5.5b) stelae at Cerro de las Mesas.

Stela 15 is excluded from this later group due to perceived Teotihuacan influence (Miller 1991; Taube 1999) in both style and subject matter. However, hieroglyphs are rendered in pure Veracruz Late Classic fashion. The frontally portrayed goddess wearing a dominant jaguar headdress also has counterparts in a certain subset of Rio Blanco

bowls, depicting what Von Winning refers to as full frontal jaguars (Von Winning and Gutierrez Solana 1996). Although the jaguars convey certain jaguar iconographic elements, we can also view them as parturient goddess figures—perhaps a reference to Tlazleteotl, the Veracruz goddess associated with childbirth and midwifery.

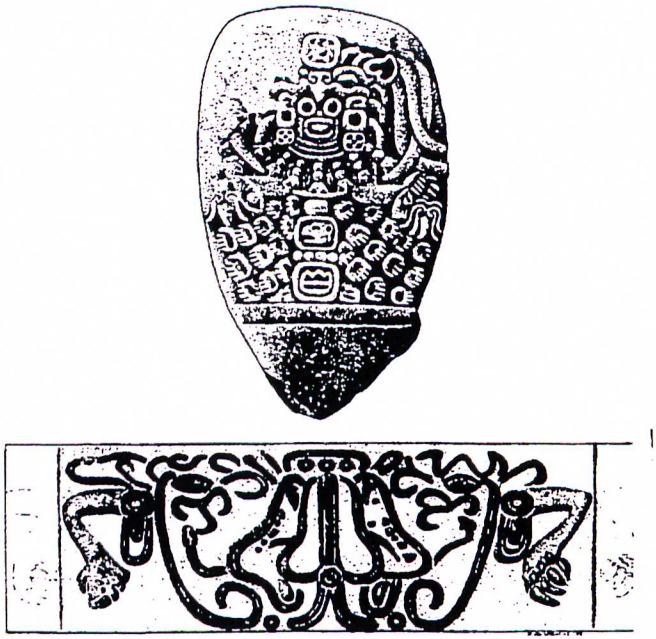


Figure 5.6 Veracruz "Jaguar Goddess" imagery: 5.6a Cerro de las Mesas ST15 (above) (after Spinden) and carvings on a Rio Blanco bowl (Von Winning 1996)

Cerro de las Mesas and El Tajin are the only two sites with occupational phases dating to the Late-Terminal Classic containing stone sculpture using the Late Classic variant of Mixe-Zoquan "Epi-Olmec" script. The Late Classic Veracruz sites of Piedra Labrada and Maltrata also have stone monuments containing hieroglyphic inscriptions, but these hieroglyphs correspond to the writing system at Xochicalco in Central Mexico.

The Maya Region: Seibal, Jimbal, and Ucanal

Seibal sculpture considered in this study originates from stelae referred to by John A. Graham (1990:51-73) as Group IV Monuments. These stelae are characterized by non-Classic elements, the absence of *katun* dedication markers, and overall brevity of hieroglyphic texts (Graham 1990:51). Dating is based on archaeological contexts and stylistic association.

Several stelae in this group contain iconography connecting them with Late Classic Veracruz. However, it is the inclusion of non-Maya square cartouche day signs that captures our attentions here.

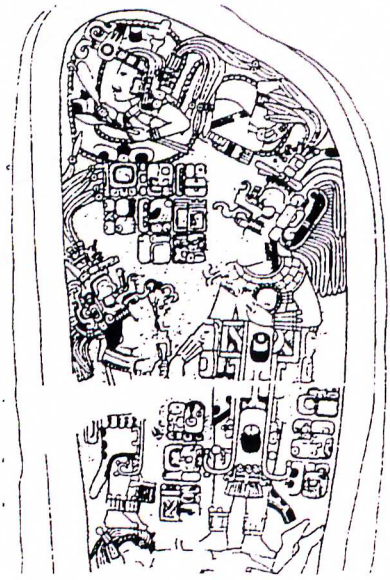


Figure 5.8 Ucanal Stela 1 incorporating square cartouche day signs, drawing by Ian Graham

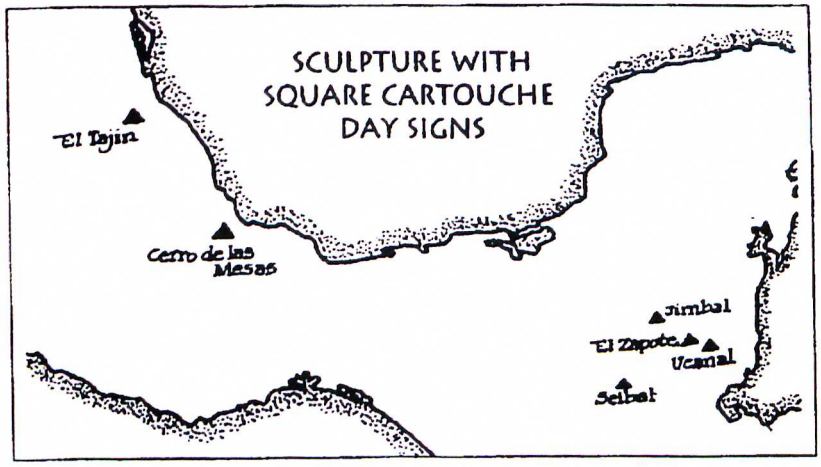


Figure 5.9 Map showing sculpture discussed in this study.

The day signs appear on three stelae at Seibal: Stela 3, Stela 13, and Stela 18, as well as on Stela 4 from Ucanal, Jimbal 1 and 2, and El Zapote Stela 5. Ucanal Stela 4 has a Long Count date of 10.1.0.0.0, and stylistically these other monuments are probably contemporaneous. Graham (1990:63) also notes that Calakmul Stela 86 has "curious square glyphs on its two sides...the glyphs seem to be separated by three dots, almost like the glyphs on pottery." And it is to pottery that we now turn.

Chapter Six
Ceramics

Mesoamerican cultural historians have long noted the exchange of ideas and artifacts between the Gulf Coast and Maya region. We see this relationship manifest in the carved relief panels and portable objects discussed in the previous chapters. Yet, it is in fine paste, mold-made ceramics that lines of style, form, iconography, hieroglyphs, materials, and methods intersect like a starburst, erasing any lingering doubts that these two areas share an important and intricate relationship during the last phases of the Classic Period.

Hieroglyphs appear on two Fine Orange ceramic types: Rio Blanco, from the Mixtequilla of southern Veracruz and Pabellon molded-carved, manufactured in the Pasion drainage of what is today northwestern Guatemala. Both are made with similar Fine Orange clay, using a nearly identical manufacturing process. At first glance Rio Blanco and Pabellon bowls are indistinguishable. A third fine paste ware—Fine Relief Blackware from El Tajin—also has hieroglyphs, along with a similar iconographic program to that found on Rio Blanco ceramics.

Escuintla or Tiquisate pottery from Pacific coastal Guatemala contains a markedly different form of hieroglyphs from those found on Tajin Fine Relief Blackware, Rio Blanco, and Pabellon ceramics, respectively. I focus on Escuintla material briefly in this chapter, since it shares an observable iconographic connection with several important sites and related materials in this study. By its unexplained presence the Escuintla

material offers another piece in the puzzle of cause-and-effect that characterizes the flow of ideas between the two principal areas of this study.

Use of Molds in Mesoamerican Ceramics: A Brief Historic Overview

Wide-scale use of molds in the production of Mesoamerican ceramics begins at Teotihuacan with the limited manufacture of mold-made decorative elements on incensarios during the Late Tlamimilolpa. By the early Xolalpan we see molded heads added to hand-modeled figurines. These ceramics clearly reflect commercial exchange between Teotihuacan and other areas, particularly the Gulf of Mexico and the Maya area (Rattray 1981; von Winning and Gutierrez Solana 1996). In the period that followed (Late Xolapan) artisans used mold halves for common household vessels (ibid). Teotihuacan art exhibits this gradual move towards full-scale mass production (Miller 1996:74).

Teotihuacan exported the style and elements of its ceramics to the distant realms of the ancient Classic Maya. Despite adopting a distinctly Teotihuacan flare, Maya vases with Teotihuacan influence were produced locally (Miller 1996:116; Santley 1989:133 [Kidder et al. 1946; Ball 1983; Berlo 1984; Santley et al. 1984, 1985c]) in most cases. Mold-made decorative elements allowed for a creative reconfiguration of mass-produced standardized parts. These inventive permutations reflect the zeitgeist inherent in Mesoamerican thought and culture, as well as the evolution of new regional styles invigorated by fresh outside influences.

Influences moved in both directions. The fine paste ceramics of the Tuxlas region and lustrous wares of the Tajin area find their way to Teotihuacan during the Late

Xolalpan and Metepec phases, at a time when increased use of molds and large scale production profoundly affect the ceramics industry.

Creation of vessels decorated in relief begins in the Metepec phase, with the elaborate mold-made vessels of Las Colinas (Rattray 1981:412). The Las Colinas bowl is typical of Teotihuacan Mold-Impressed ware, found in the merchant barrios of that city (Rattray 1981: Figure 274; von Winning and Gutierrez Solana 1996:18); many with Maya or "Tajinoid" designs (ibid). In the rubble piles of Yayahuala, Sejourne (1963:148) found more than 200 fragments with these molded decorations, all with what he considered to be Teotihuacan or Maya designs. Mold-impressed fragments with Maya designs also show up at Santiago Ahuitzolta (von Winning 1947:202-213). The tradition of relief-decorated ceramics continued until the Teotihuacan collapse, as reflected in a change in ceramic traditions during the Coyotlatelco phase.

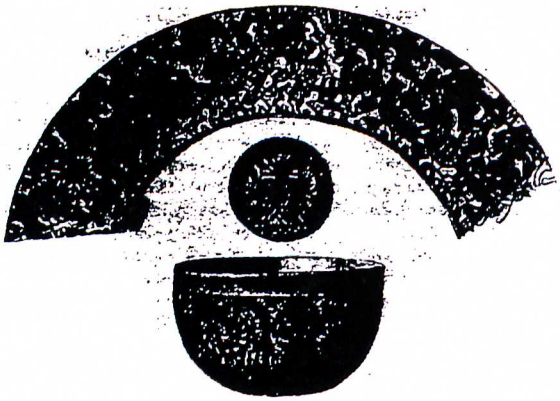


Figure 6.1 Las Colimas bowl (Linné 1942; Von Winning and Gutierrez Solana 1996)

In the Mixtequilla, archaeological data provides little evidence for a widespread mold-made ceramics industry during the Early Classic period. Only three small fragments

of relief vessels come out of Drucker's excavations at Cerro de las Mesas; none of these with complete designs (Drucker 1943a: figures 121, 127, and 131). At Tres Zapotes ceramics with reliefs are rare during this period, and apparently imported (Drucker 1943b: 22).

Rattray's findings from the Teotihuacan commercial barrios offer the enticing suggestion that mold-made vessels are of Gulf Coast origin. To date, these finding do not appear to be corroborated by the archaeological data from Veracruz. This problem is more complex when a precise Gulf Coast source location is unknown, since during the Classic area, Veracruz comprised at least three distinct stylistic and cultural areas.

Tula, Hidalgo

Mold made relief-carved vessels disappear in Central Mexico at the end of the Classic Period. At Tula, Hidalgo Robert Cobean (Cobean 1990) discovered between 8 and 10 sherds from wares similar to the Las Colinas bowl believed to be from the Corral Phase (800-900 C.E.). The majority of these sherds come from bowls or cylindrical vases. Cobean's photograph (Lamina 91, p. 200, Proc. 14 025 121) is unmistakably that of a Rio Blanco rim sherd. Rio Blanco wares (discussed in greater detail below) are densely concentrated in the Mixtequilla-Tuxtlas region of southern Vercaruz, yet they strongly resemble an assortment of Late and Terminal Classic ceramic types found throughout southeastern Mesoamerica between C.E. 800-1000. Cobean suggests that these were imported wares.

Such ceramic types must have been extremely rare at Tula. Richard Diehl (Diehl 1983) writes that although his team identified a few sherds of varying kinds from the Tuxtlas, Fine Orange pottery is conspicuous by its absence. Diehl notes that he finds this

absence perplexing since Tula has an abundance of Plumbate—a ceramic type nearly always found in conjunction with Fine Orange. It is also worth mentioning here that Molded-carved Fine Orange in the form of Pabellon wares are also conspicuously absent at the site of Chichen Itza in northern Yucatan.

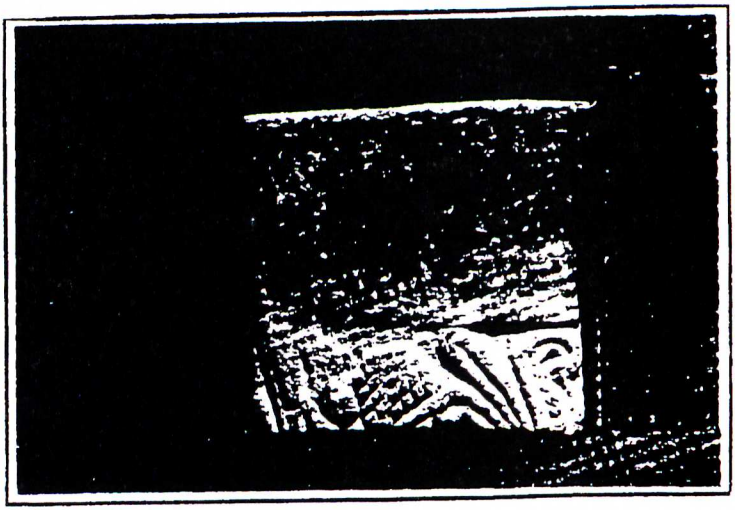


Figure 6.2 Rio Blanco style sherd at Tula, Hidalgo (from Cobean 1990, Lamina 91)

Veracruz Ceramics In the Late Classic Period: Sculpted Relief Wares and Rio Blanco Pottery

North-Central Veracruz

El Tajin

El Tajin, as has been noted, yielded Fine Relief Blackware pottery excavated by Wilfredo du Solier in the 1930's. Du Solier referred to these as "Captive Taking Vessels." He recorded finding "hundreds" of blackware sherds with the 13 Rabbit glyph in debris

near the Mound of the Building Columns. In addition to ceramics naming 13 Rabbit, DuSolier noted the presence of certain relief carved pieces with rectangular hieroglyphs, which he suspected were Maya hieroglyphs (DuSolier 1945:156). DuSolier's relief decorated ceramics depict the aftermath of warfare, rituals involving dancers in bird costume, zoomorphs, and processional figures decked out in rich plumage. Rex Koontz points out that many of the themes present on Fine Relief Blackware exist "in a shorthand of the relief columns' imagery" (Koontz 2001: 6).

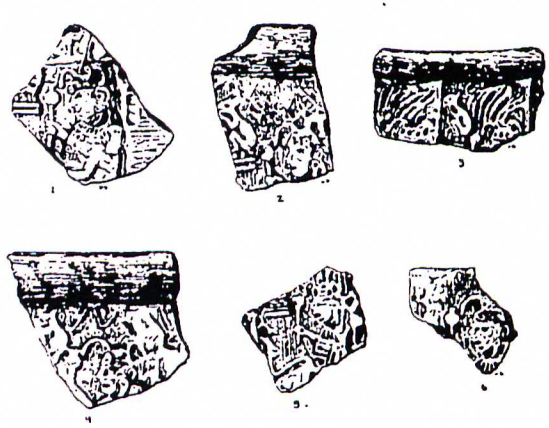


Figure 6.3 Fine Relief Blackware, from DuSolier 1945.

The Blackware sherds originate in relief-decorated hemispheric bowls (DuSolier 1945:155), not unlike Rio Blanco and Pabellon Molded-carved wares. The beauty and refinement of these Blackwares contrasted with other ceramics DuSolier came across at El Tajin (ibid).

DuSolier developed ceramic categories in relation to specific Tajin areas and architecture. I find it interesting that Du Solier linked Fine Relief Blackware with Fine

Orange ware in his type category system. On the basis of his analysis, both appear late in early chronologies of the site. Revised chronologies also place these types towards the end of El Tajin's occupational sequence.

Blackware sherds comprise 2.01% of the total ceramics at El Tajin, with Fine Orange making up another 4.51% (Reyes Lopez 1996). Many of the same structures yielded both ceramic types (including Building 10, Building K, the Great Xicalcoliuhqui, and the Area E retaining wall), with the greatest sherd density originating in Ballcourt contexts. While these wares combined only make up 6.52% of total sherds at El Tajin, sherd counts are highest for both types (87% of Fine Blackware and 53% of Fine Orange) in ballcourts.

Dorothee Rinkee (1992: 44; and Foto 70) notes the connection between Du Solier's relief-carved ceramics (*"reliefverzierte keramik"*) and wares found at Chachalacas, Veracruz (ibid [Garcia Payon 1951c:25]), as well as Rio Blanco pottery (discussed below). Rinkee located five comparable sherds in her excavations of the household architecture at El Tajin. One sherd is carved with a reptilian eye (Rinkee 1992:45) —an omnipresent part of Tajin and Classic Veracruz symbolic vocabulary. DuSolier (1945:156) found this same symbol (*"el ojo de serpiente emplumada"*) on blackware sherds from the Mound of the Building Columns. Rinkee also found Fine Orange wares with carved designs, as well as modeled blackware. Thus, we see fine paste wares as well as relief ware (perhaps using a mold and then modified by carving) present at the site.

Figure 6.4 Serpent eye motif on fine paste relief-carved ceramics, from Rinkee 1992

Southern Veracruz

Rio Blanco Pottery

Knowledge of the ceramic type known as Rio Blanco comes largely from the published work of iconographer Hasso von Winning (1965; 1976a; 1976b; 1980; 1983; 1996). Most of these vessels came to light in the area south of the Rio Blanco, a river in the Mixtequilla region (located to the south of the modern city of Veracruz). The source of Rio Blanco bowls is in the vicinity of the town of Huachin, although whether or not this is where the vessels originate is not known, since the objects are obtained illegally; their exact provenience unknown (ibid). Von Winning and co-author Nelly Gutierrez Solana (1996:7 and 36) acknowledge the existence of just one group of Rio Blanco bowls with archaeological context, excavated at the site of El Faisan close to the modern city of Veracruz.

The Mixtequilla, located between two rivers—the Rio Blanco to the north and the Rio Papaloapan to the east—is home to La Mojarra and Cerro de las Mesas, two important sources of Veracruz writing (see Chapter 8). Tres Zapotes, another site with early hieroglyphic writing lies just east of the Papaloapan, at the foot of the Tuxtla

Mountains. The entire area incorporates several important varieties of Veracruz sculpture, as well as a wealth of hieroglyphic inscriptions.

The hemispheric bowls consist of fine paste orange or light reddish-brown clay (von Winning and Gutierrez Solana 1996:15). Bowls are uniform in color, and although not painted in any way, there is a slight sheen to what is otherwise a matt finish. Clay exhibits no visible tempering. Some of these bowls, as ceramics experts Barbara Welles Hopkins and Florencia Muller (1999: 29) point out, are actually made from black clays. This is an especially important point since it forges an even closer connection between Rio Blanco wares and what DuSolier called Fine Relief Blackware. It is very likely that these are the same ceramics—using similar but regionally available clay types within a spectrum of colors ranging from a yellow-orange to a deep shade of blackish brown.

Artisans produced relief decoration using two molds—one for each vessel half. In the majority of bowls there is a slightly visible seam where the two halves are conjoined. Relief carvings of narrative, pictorial scenes encircle the nearly straight, vertical walls of the ceramic vessels (Von Winning and Gutierrez Solana 1996). Figure 6.5 illustrates the technique of using a double mold for producing a relief-decorated hemispheric bowl (Hopkins and Muller 1999:8-9, 29-30).

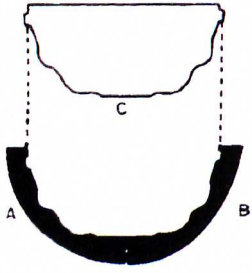


Figure 6.5 Hemispheric bowl with carved designs made in a double mold, from Hopkins and Muller 1999

To date, according to von Winning and Gutierrez Solana, none of the molds or workshops have been located; however the authors speculate that the molds were probably destroyed after use. Some evidence suggests that the same mold was used to manufacture up to three vessels (ibid). Barbara Kerr (personal communication) described this same process of manufacture, in explaining the appearance of both Rio Blanco and Pabellon Molded-carved bowls and vases. Kerr also thinks that it is likely that the molds were destroyed after limited use.

Frequently, details were remodeled after the initial molding process (von Winning and Gutierrez Solana 1996:15). Some of the vessel walls are surprisingly thin; yet relief decorations cover the entire exterior circumference and in some cases the base of the bowls. It is the use of molds, according to artist and Hartford Art School graduate student Kristen Levine, which accounts for the lack of tempering material in the clay.

> "There were no wheel thrown vases during this time. The viewer can tell that the pot is made from a mold and not hand-built by looking at [the] shards of broken pottery. If an object is hand-built, the builder may add a substance known as grog or tempering to the clay. This is sand, dirt, or some other substance that would help toughen the texture of the clay and allow the hand-builder to keep the shape of the pot while creating it. If an object is made through a mold, the slip (the thin watery clay) must be completely pure when it is poured into the mold. Any piece of debris that is in the slip when pouring the mold will crack and shatter the pot. Therefore, if you look at the shards of these pots, you will notice in the cross grain that there are not any impurities; thus, signifying that it is a mold-made vessel. Most likely these pots were poured into the mold and then lightly fired to harden slightly. Then they were carved when the texture was tough but not rock solid. After the designs and stories were carved into the bowls, they were probably fired again to retain the image in the pottery and to have a watertight and long lasting ceramic piece" (Levine: unpublished paper, 2001).

Since mold-made vessels lack tempering, the chemical composition of clay is important. It needs to be naturally cohesive, lacking any impurities of its own. Given this consideration, clay sources take on new importance.

Linda Schildkraut (1996), writing on two Rio Blanco bowls from New York's Merrin Gallery offers an alternative explanation for how these vessels are made—

> "When the bowls were first acquired by the gallery from an eminent private collector in 1968, examination of Vessel 2 revealed that the outer wall had been improperly restored. When it was detached in the process of correcting the mistake, it became apparent that the scene on the inner wall was virtually identical to that on Vessel 1, indicating the motif's importance. Since Vessel 2's relief is slightly smaller and more softly formed, it was concluded that Vessel 2 had probably been molded from Vessel 1. The outer wall is composed of individual figures cut from slabs of clay that were curved to conform to the shape of the vessel. This was reattached, connected at the top to the projecting band and under the base at the basal ring. Although it partially obscures the inner wall, the outer wall does not touch it."

Schildkraut's observations help to explain why some vessels look mold-impressed, while other bowls have a deep, sculpted appearance. This sense of depth is amplified by red ocher or cinnabar rubbed in the recesses provided by the smooth walls behind the protruding figures. As Schildkraut notes, the addition of a supplemental decoration over a primary motif is unusual.

Lacking archaeological context, dating of Rio Blanco pottery is problematic. Von Winning and Gutierrez Solana (1996:16) assign a Late Classic date, based on their understanding of costumes and rituals illustrated on the surface of the bowls, and comparing them with garments, ceremonies, and other cultural aspects of the sub-area at the end of the Classic period (ibid). They base their analysis on 65 examples, estimating total production at 115 vessels, produced over a limited span of two centuries (von Winning and Gutierrez Solana:17).

Assignation of an Epiclassic date (C.E. 700-900) presents a two-fold problem. First, and most obvious, is the lack of secure archaeological contexts. In offering these dates, Von Winning and Gutierrez Solana pound in a peg that must withstand and support other data. Any cause-and-effect relationship between Rio Blanco and Pabellon ceramic spheres rests upon confident understanding of the placement of those types in space and time. Secondly, the term and associated dates of "Epiclassic" are essentially meaningless, in my opinion. The character and developments of the Eighth Century are altogether different from those of the Ninth Century (see Chapter 14). Any interpretations must therefore remain tentative.

These problems are not entirely irreparable. The work of Ron Bishop and Dorie Reents Budet demonstrates that important information can still be gleaned from materials lacking archaeological provenience. The Maya Polychrome Ceramics Project's Conservation Analytical Laboratory at the Smithsonian Institution chemically sampled thousands of Maya painted ceramics through Instrumental Neutron Activation Analysis (Reents Budet 1994:xix; Reents-Budet, Bishop, and MacLeod 1994:164-169) thereby devising an empirical means for connecting vessels with geographic locations.

These methods could easily be applied to Rio Blanco ceramic bowls in order to identify constituent materials. Ceramics of individual communities "are characterized...by a specific constellation of paste compositional features" (Reentz-Budet, Bishop, and MacLeod 1994:168). "A group of visually similar pottery vessels whose paste composition is equally homogeneous should represent the artistic production of a particular group of professional ceramicists creating pottery in a face-to-face production environment in the same community and possibly even the same workshop"

(ibid). Ancient potters developed unique blends of raw materials, ceramic paste and slip recipes, and firing procedures for producing uniformity in their vessels. All stages of production required relative consistency (Reentz-Budet, Bishop, and MacLeod 1994:167). By analyzing samples of Rio Blanco bowls, these recipes and procedures would tell us more about the desired product.

Drawing on studies of contemporary Maya potters (Arnold 1971:199-226; and Howry 1978: 239-257), Reents-Budet, Bishop, and MacLeod (1994:167) tell us that potters devise preferred clay bodies by persistently using particular raw clay resources and tempers. The relationship between the desired raw materials, recipes, and procedures in one community with those in another may help to explain the spread of ceramic types and accompanying technology. In the case of Rio Blanco and Pabellon pottery, such knowledge might help us in understanding the similar appearance of two ceramics types, both with separate clay sources and workshops.

We must also bear in mind that Rio Blanco wares exhibit variation in clay colors as well as in modes of manufacture. The final appearance was probably most important to the ancient artisans producing these ceramics. Since molds essentially allow ceramic artists the freedom to create a certain style of pottery using locally available naturally resources, there are obvious limitations to chemical sourcing. Recall that the Maya created their own Teotihucan-style ceramics locally using available resources, often using molds to combine exotically "foreign" elements in fresh, innovative ways.

Given the obvious "inconsistencies" in materials and techniques it is little wonder that tracking the distribution of Rio Blanco wares is difficult. Hasso Von Winning cites El Faisan as the only place where Rio Blanco wares come from stratigraphic context.

There is a certain underlying paradox to this claim, since over the course of a half century Von Winning both defined Rio Blanco as a type and documented its distribution. Yet several archaeological ceramics reports contain excavated material consistent with Von Winning's overall description of the type. Given this information, I would expand sites yielded Rio Blanco wares to include El Zapotal, Tres Zapotes, Pollinayan, La Antigua, Matacapan, and San Lorenzo Tenochtitlan, as well as including the aforementioned Fine Relief Blackwares from El Tajin. This places the distribution of these wares in the same Gulf Coast geographic range as the square cartouche day signs in Chapter Nine.

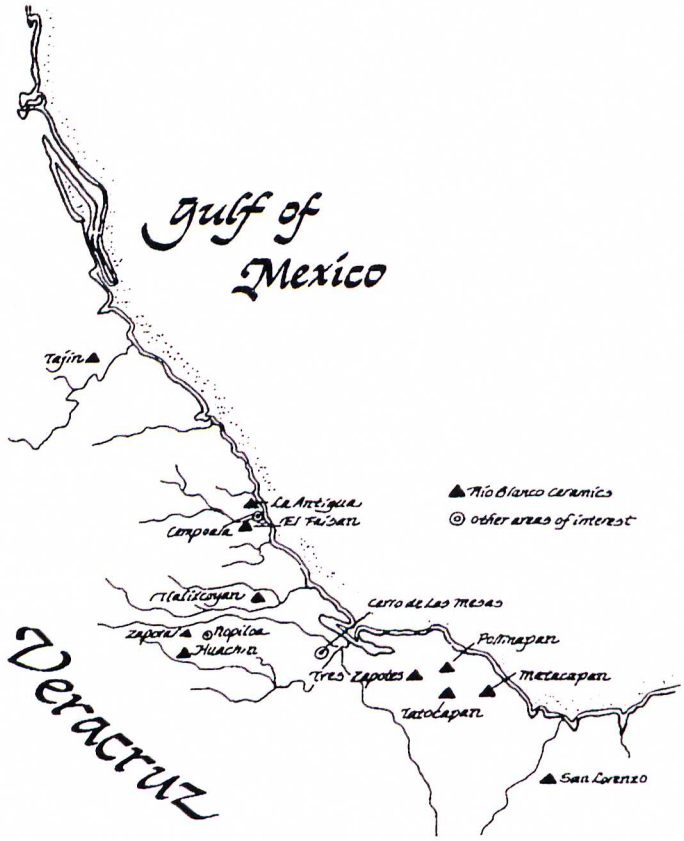


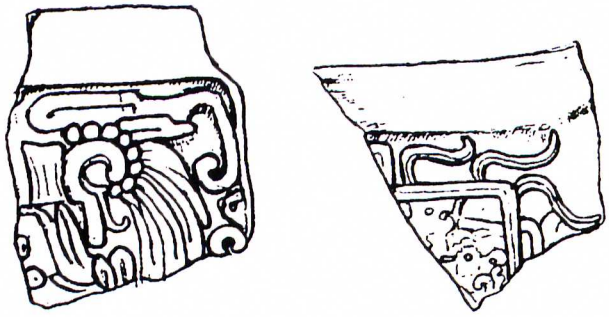
Figure 6.7 Map showing location of Rio Blanco style ceramics, Cherra Wyllie

Tres Zapotes

What Clarence Wolsey Weiant (1943:113) calls "sculpted pottery" at Tres Zapotes are undoubtedly Rio Blanco ceramics. Weiant describes these as "manufactured out of smooth, untempered yellow or cream-colored clay, although a few...are dark gray or black" (ibid). "Sculpted pottery" at Tres Zapotes came from a depth of 3 meters in a deposit east of Mound D in the Ranchito Group (Weiant 1943:10-11, and 113). The

sherds and bowl fragments were found at the same level as yoke fragments, as well as sherds and figurines dubbed by Weiant as "Mayoid" (ibid). He notes resemblance between design elements on sculpted pottery vessels with those on Tajin relief carvings, as well as ceramics from the Maya area (including a definite Pabellon Molded-carved sherd from Piedras Negras). Yet, while recording visual similarities Weiant (1943:114) writes—

> "Despite the various parallels cited, however, there can be no doubt, in the view of the thousands of other sherds of identical clay and firing found at Tres Zapotes, that these sherds are all local manufacture. Lothrop (1936) has pointed out that sculpted pottery of the kind shown in figures 12-19 [undoubtedly Rio Blanco] was already being manufactured by the Old Empire Maya, that it has a wide distribution, and that it may have had a northern origin. Its occurrence at Tres Zapotes is by no means exceptional for the Tuxtla region. At several places in this area, notably at Talocapan and Poyinapan, Lic. Juan Valenzuela and his colleagues of the Museo Nacional de Arqueologia, Historia y Etnografia of Mexico, working in collaboration with the Carnegie Institution of Washington, obtained such sherds in considerable abundance."



Figures 6.7a and 6.7b Rio Blanco style pottery from Tres Zapotes, Cherra Wyllie, after Weiant 1943.

Philip Drucker uncovered what *also* appear to be Rio Blanco sherds in Trench 2 (12-13 inches), Trench 1, and Trench 24 at Tres Zapotes. Yet, Drucker calls these "Carved-ware" sherds (Drucker 1943:129 and Plate 22). Since neither Weiant nor Drucker was apparently familiar with the technique for making molded-carved wares, the

untempered, relief decorated ceramics looked "sculpted" to one archaeologist and "carved" to the other.

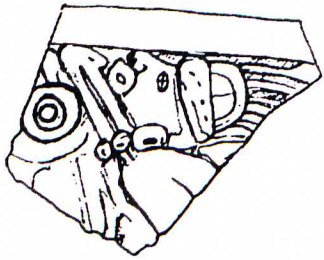


Figure 6.7c Rio Blanco style sherd from Tres Zapotes, Cherra Wyllie, from Drucker 1943.

What I find compelling about the observations of Weiant and his early colleagues is their ability to draw broad comparisons based on an overall understanding of ceramics from wide-ranging contexts. While these early archaeologists frequently drew erroneous conclusions, their instincts on possible connections were highly attuned; the more-so because they knew what was "out there." Unfortunately, as ceramic studies became more regional and site-specific, the field of fertile insights from this earlier generation of scholars lay fallow.

La Antigua, Veracruz

The archaeological site of La Antigua, Veracruz lies north of the modern city of Veracruz and due south of the ruins of Zempoala along the Huitzilapan River. Lic. Mario Navarrete Hernandez records the presence of Fine Orange wares from this site decorated with volutes, geometric motifs, and scrolls or hooks. An especially compelling sherd from a bowl of this type comes from upper levels of pit IX at that site. Although Navarrete

Hernandez interprets the sherd as reading One Rabbit, it is not clear that the zoomorphic head is a rabbit at all, or even a calendric sign. Be that as it may, what seems altogether provocative about this piece is its resemblance in form, style, and content to certain non-Maya glyph bands found on Pabellon Molded-carved ceramics manufactured in the Pasion drainage of Guatemala. Pabellon wares date to the Terminal Classic (after C.E. 830). Navarrete Hernandez connects the portion of the inscription from La Antigua with similar wares from Isla de Sacrificios II, earlier in the Classic Period. This being the case, it indicates that the transition of these symbols traveled south along the Gulf Coast over time, along with the introduction of fine paste pottery, especially Fine Orange.

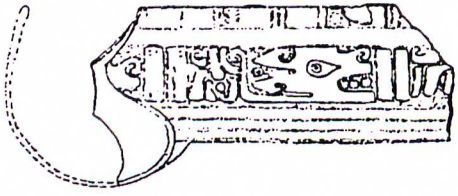


Figure 6.8 Rio Blanco style pottery from La Antigua, from Navarrete Hernandez.

The Tuxtlas

Matacapan

Matacapan is best known as Teotihuacan's economic staging area on the Gulf Coast, a point well documented by the work of archeologist Robert Santley (1983, 1984, 1989). Earlier excavations by Juan Valenzuela during the 1930's uncovered carved or sculpted vase fragments in a color Valenzuela describes as yellow-ochre (1945: 99), one showing a human hand in a mode favorable with later Pabellon conventions in the Maya area. This fragment comes from an upper layer of Matacapan Mound 4 along with an

abundance of carved shell decorated with rabbits, reptilian eyed zoomorphic figures and other imagery commonly associated with Late Classic Veracruz (ibid).

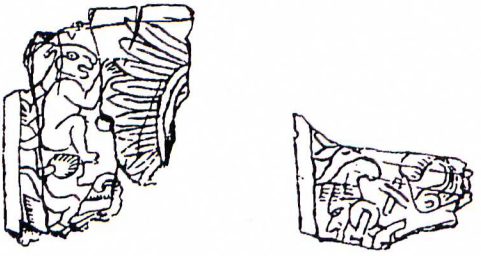


Figure 6.8 Carved shell from Matacapan, from Valenzuela 1945 (also see Coe 1972).

Valenzuela found a comparable sherd decorated with the Teotihuacan *trapeze and ray* symbol in the seventh level of Mound 3 at that site (1945:97). The sherd comes from a bowl with small rounded tripod supports—a vessel form conforming with a number of Rio Blanco bowls. The Teotihucan iconography suggests a substantial time-depth for this bowl type and mode of manufacturing in southern Veracruz, perhaps upwards of 500 years (considerably more than calculated by Von Winning and Gutierrez Solana).

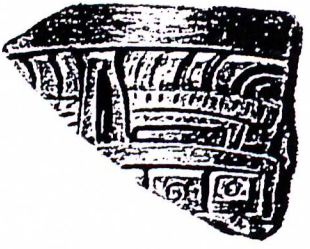


Figure 6.9 Rio Blanco style sherd from Matacapan, from Valenzuela 1945.

Pollinapan, Veracruz

In addition to Matacapan, Juan Valenzuela excavated a substantial number of sites in the Tuxtlas region during the early half of the Twentieth Century. Among these are Tatocapan and Pollinapan, two sites on private property near Santiago Tuxtla. Recall that Weiant referred to these sites as other sources for the "sculpted wares" that he uncovered at Tres Zapotes. To Weaint's eye the iconography looked "Mayoid" (1943:10-11 and 113). Apparently, Valenzuela had the same impression. Looking at an engraved decorated vase fragment the archaeologist noted that the figure resembled a Maya deity, possibly God K (Valenzuela 1945: 88).

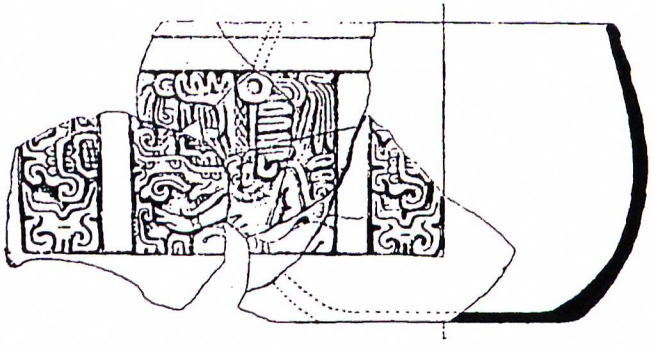


Figure 6.10 Rio Blanco style vase from Pollinapan from Valenzuela 1945.

The vase uncovered by Valenzuela came from Mound 1, Offering 3 at Pollinapan. Like Tres Zapotes Rio Blanco ware, the Pollinapan molded-carved vase came from a cache which also included stone ballgame sculpture—an hacha made of serpentine and a small palma. Other artifacts retrieved from Mound 1, Offering 3 were an engraved vase fragment with what Valenzuela referred to as "Cipactli in Maya style" and smooth stone heads depicting animals and deities (such as Ehecatl) (Valenzuela 1945: 85 and 87).

Outside of Pollinapan, the El Tajin Fine Blackware vessels and Rio Blanco ceramics we have discussed so far are bowls. The Pollinapan vase introduces a new vessel shape to the corpus of fine paste relief wares from Late Classic Veracruz—a barrel-shaped vase or possibly a deeper bowl type with a bulging base and more constricted rim. This shape is reminiscent of Maya Pabellon Molded-carved Fine Orange vases from the Terminal Classic period. The monster mask substituting for the figure's head is a common motif on Pabellon pottery, while the posture of the figure has few if any counterparts in Classic Veracruz art. He sits tailor fashion, body fully frontal, his head turned in profile. He shares a similar countenance with paired figures at the bottom register of Seibal Stela 3, or the humans and supernaturals found on Pabellon Molded-carved vases from Waxactun. Despite the simple quality of the line, the Maya understanding of foreshortening seems in evidence here, contrasting it with the somewhat more static rendering of "Tajin-style" figures. Yet the traits characterizing Veracruz and Maya style and iconography unexpectedly substitute one for another. Like a Trickster or doppelganger, they force us to question our command of the defining properties that distinguish a time, place, or people, all the while underscoring the necessity for archaeological context in helping us sort out the puzzle.

Northern Isthmian Plain

San Lorenzo Tenochtitlan

At San Lorenzo Rio Blanco wares form part of the Villa Alta phase (C.E. 900-1100). The Villa Alta re-occupation marks the end of a thousand year hiatus at San Lorenzo (Coe and Diehl 1980:213). Throughout the site the uppermost strata is replete

with Fine Orange ceramic sherds that Coe and Diehl dubbed "Campamento Fine Orange." According to the archaeologists Campamento Fine Orange wares "are probably identical to Fine Orange ware in the Maya lowlands, especially at Waxactun and Altar de Sacrificios. Campamento Fine Orange (fitting the description for both Rio Blanco and Pabellon Molded-carved Fine Orange ceramics) is untempered. The usually hard, very fine paste ranges in color from orange to buff gray (Coe and Diehl 1980).

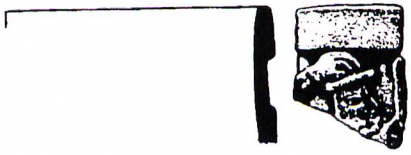


Figure 6.11 Rio Blanco style sherd from San Lorenzo, from Coe and Diehl 1980.

Molded, inscribed, and carved sherds form a subset of Campamento Fine Orange known as Zapote Orange to Gray. Surface color tends to be less orange than other Campamento wares. As we might expect, all sherds come from bowls. Figure 6.10a contains what is undoubtedly a Rio Blanco rim sherd containing pictorial narrative. Incised sherds made from similar clays contain what Coe and Diehl (1980: 216 and 218) identify as hieroglyphs (Figure 6.10b). These glyphs appear on the upper rim of the vessels, although since these come from sherds rather than whole vessels it is unclear whether these are individual hieroglyphs.

The Maya Area

Pabellon Molded-Carved

In sharp contrast with Rio Blanco ceramics, the ceramic type known as Pabellon Molded-carved (or Pabellon Modeled-carved) Fine Orange has secure archaeological

context, with firmly established temporal and geographic provenience. What is more, the Maya Fine Paste Ceramics Project conducted through the Brookhaven National Laboratory has been able to narrow the origins of its clay source and production center, suggesting a manufacturing locus on the Pasion River (Bishop and Rands 1982:314). Manufacture of this type mirrors the mode of production for Rio Blanco ceramics.

A change of type-name from Pabellon Modeled-carved to Pabellon *Molded-carved* was proposed by Richard E. W. Adams in his analysis of ceramic material from Altar de Sacrificios. Adam explains that since vessels are first molded (rather than "modeled"), then carved, *Molded-carved* is the more appropriate designation. Although Adams' term has never been widely adopted, I agree with him, and so refer to these as Pabellon Molded-carved ceramics.

The Pabellon Variety is part of a group of distinctive Mesoamerican wares known collectively as Fine Orange—characterized by a nearly homogeneous, fine textured orange paste (Smith 1958:151). Fine Orange is represented by an alphabet soup of type names, known as Z, Y, X, V, and U, respectively. Additionally, there is a vast laundry list of revised and specialized type names-- all of these slotted within cultural and ceramic chronologies along with associated regional nomenclature which varies considerably from site to site. Distribution of Fine Orange is widespread, spanning nearly a millennium. Demystifying this taxonomic tangle requires a dexterously inserted scalpel.

With respect to our topic, here are key things to know about Pabellon Molded-carved Fine Orange:

1. Pabellon Molded-carved vessels (originally) form part of the Y Fine Orange Group (known alternatively as the Fine Orange Altar Group) (Smith 1958:151). Fine Orange Altar Group paste is evenly colored throughout, with very fine texture, and no temper. The generally orange-colored surface finish is "well smoothed, usually slipped, and lightly burnished" (ibid). According to Sabloff (1975:198) Pabellon Molded-carved is probably the most widespread type in the Altar group.
2. Pabellon molded-carved ceramics comprise part of several distinct ceramic complexes, which form combined temporal, geographic, and stylistic designations based upon "high type-variety correlation." Important complexes containing Pabellon Molded-carved Fine Orange vases and bowls include:

   Sepens Phase (C.E. 830-950)

   Tepeu 3 (C.E. 800-900)

   Cehpech (C.E. 800-1000)

   Boca (C.E. 800-900)

   Jimba (C.E. 900-1000)

   All of these complexes, it should be noted, converge on or about the year C.E. 900.
3. Pabellon Molded-carved is compositionally distinct from other Fine Orange types, including the non-decorated wares of the Fine Orange Altar Group (Bishop and Rands 1982:314). This inconsistency reflects earlier ceramic typologies, created before the chemical procedures and compositional analyses performed at Brookhaven (Pabellon Modeled-carved was first established as a type and variety

(Pabellon) by Smith and Gifford at Waxactun during the 1950's) (Sabloff 1975:195).

Pabellon ceramics are both typologically and petrographically distinct, notably lacking in volcanic materials such as pumice, ash, and dust (Bishop and Rands 1982:306) which are present in Fine Orange and Fine Gray wares of the Altar, Balancan, and Tres Naciones Ceramic Groups (Bishop and Rands:314). On these bases Bishop and Rands see production of the latter groups (Altar, Balancan, and Tres Naciones) in the Usumacinta drainage, while proposing that Pabellon Molded-carved wares were manufactured along the lower Pasion drainage (Bishop and Rands: 306-307) Annual flooding in the Pasion region's alluvial flood plain would have provided an "accumulation of fine sediments, suitable for the production of fine paste pottery" (ibid).

4. There are only two principal vessel types for Pabellon molded-carved: "a flaring side bowl rounding to a flat base and a barrel-shape vase with ring-stand base" (Sabloff 1975:195).
5. Distribution of Pabellon Molded-carved is fairly widespread in the Maya area, found at Altar de Sacrificios, Seibal, Yaxha, Kixpek, Kakum, Piedras Negras, Tonina, San Agustin Acasaguastlan, Seamay Cave, Tikal, Jaina, Waxactun, Zacaleu, Benque Viejo, El Cayo, Lubaantun, San Salvador, Uxmal, Mayapan, San Jose, Finca El Salvador Cave, Palenque, Copan, Yaxchilan, Alta Verapaz, Nohmul, Kohunlich, Jimbal, Becan, Calakmul, Xcocom, Chiccana, Punta de Chimino, Motul de San Jose, Punta Camara. Barton Ramie, Caracol, Xunantunich, and Punta Camara.

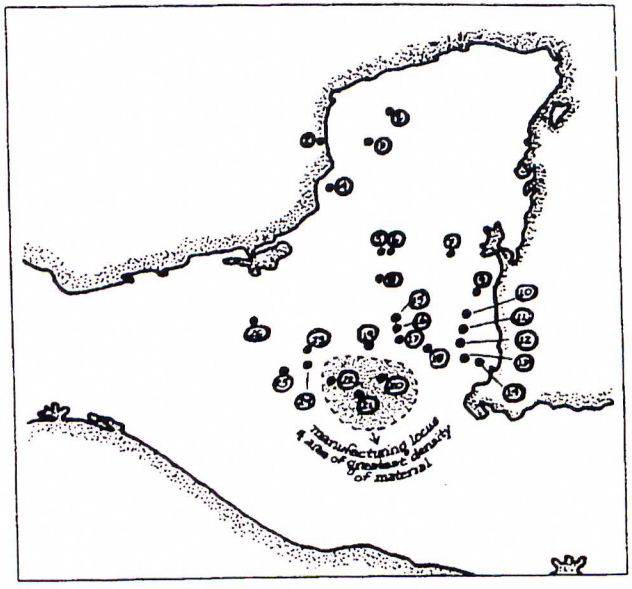


Figure 6.12 Map showing known distribution of Pabellon Molded-carved Fine Orange ceramics. Cherra Wyllie

Pabellon vases and bowls are notably absent at Chichen Itza. Highest concentrations appear in areas closest to the proposed area of production along the Rio Pasion at Seibal and Altar de Sacrificios, apparently radiating out from that point. There is no evidence of this type along the northern and eastern coastal areas of the Yucatan Peninsula; nor do we find Pabellon ceramics in the Chontalapa in Tabasco. These absences are especially significant since according to Thompson they were the areas of operation for the enigmatic "Putun," semi-mythical sea-farers, frequently linked with Pabellon Molded-carved ceramics, occasionally blamed for the Classic Maya collapse.

Figure 6.13 Vessel shapes for Pabellon Molded-carved wares.

During the summers of 1999 and 2000, working through assistance of the governing archaeological bodies of Mexico (Instituto Nacional Antropologia e Historia or INAH) and Guatemala (Instituto de Antropologia e Historia or IDAEH) I conducted a preliminary survey of all available extant Pabellon ceramics, and to the best of my abilities charted their geographic distribution. Throughout the course of my research, I made drawings of Pabellon sherds and whole or partial vessels, using materials stored in institutional ceramic storage *bodegas.* Since excavations generating these ceramics represent dozens of archaeological sites in two countries in a period spanning approximately fifty years, not all materials survive in carefully catalogued collections. Some of the ceramics reside in university museum collections in the United States, or in other countries conducting joint ventures in their host countries. In several cases, systems for cataloguing and storing ceramics are woefully inadequate (when such systems are instituted at all!). Likewise, I found no clear standardization in the archaeological reports referencing the ceramics.

Data inconsistencies notwithstanding, I observe that *hieroglyphs* on Pabellon Molded-carved vases and bowls seem to have a near-direct relationship with the quantity and geographic distribution of this type throughout the Maya region. Nearer to the production heartland, Pabellon vases and bowls contain non-Maya hieroglyphs in horizontal and vertical glyph bands, as well as non-Maya square-cartouche calendric signs. The calendric signs mirror the same glyphic forms present on carved stelae from Seibal, Ucanal, and Jimbal within the same geographic region. Further afield, at the site of Copan, for example, we have Pabellon Molded-carved vessels with recognizably Maya hieroglyphic writing. At the peripheries of the distribution area, it appears that the style and appearance of these ceramics were adopted without necessarily employing all of the symbolic vocabulary. This suggests to me that after the Classic Maya collapse areas of eastern Yucatan conservatively retained old traditions.

At the same period in areas lacking Pabellon material altogether, molded and/or carved wares exhibit new popularity, replacing painted polychromes so characteristic of the Late Classic Maya fluorescence. This replacement takes place throughout the Maya landscape, implying a major shift in aesthetics.

Another point of note along these lines is that nearer to the Pasion region, Pabellon bowls and vases exhibit substantially more variety in form as well as in their hieroglyphic texts and pictorial scenes. Conversely, in outlying areas we find what appears to be a limited, standard variety of "export wares," giving the impression of mold-made mass production.

Ceramic analysis reveals that trade networks in the Petexbatun actually *shorten* during the Terminal Classic Sepens Phase (C.E. 830-950), in addition to an overall

decrease in pottery exchange (Foais and Bishop nd) throughout the region. The Pasion-Upper Usumacinta area becomes the production center of new ceramic types (ibid; Foias and Bishop 1994; Bishop and Rands 1982). Research by Foias and Bishop (nd) demonstrates that fine paste wares from this region distributed into the Petexbatun are compositionally identical to fine pastes (including Altar Fine Orange) from Altar de Sacrificios and Seibal. Tres Naciones Fine Gray and Altar Fine Orange (which includes Pabellon Molded-carved) represent the only new ceramic groups introduced into the area during the period from C.E. 830-950; yet these wares were uncommon, the total types representing only 4% of all ceramics in the area (Foais and Bishop nd).

Apart from a handful of sites in the Peten, presence of Pabellon Molded-carved wares elsewhere is consistent with findings from the Petexbatun. The material is under-represented, always late, coming on the heels of the Classic Maya Collapse.

The corpus found in Appendix 6.2 contains a general survey of Pabellon material from throughout the Maya region. In addition to artifacts containing hieroglyphs, I include sherds and vessels that do not. I add these because I feel that the context and distribution of these materials sheds light on social processes that accompanied the spread of new ideas and symbols, *regardless* of how such information was accepted (or rejected).

Discussion

Several patterns emerge from even this cursory survey of the data found in Appendix 6.2. Apart from Seibal, which continues to flourish, Pabellon Molded-carved material appears as surface material in degenerate lowland Maya cities and always in Terminal Classic contexts. Although archaeologists debate the nature of ceramic

complexes—their makeup, relationships between pottery types, geographic origins of constituent materials, and overall duration of the complex-- all chronologies place Pabellon Molded-carved at about the year C.E. 900. Most ceramic sequences containing Pabellon bracket it within a time range of about 830-950.

Whole vessels (apart from those now residing in private collections—and undoubtedly these too) derive from elite burials.

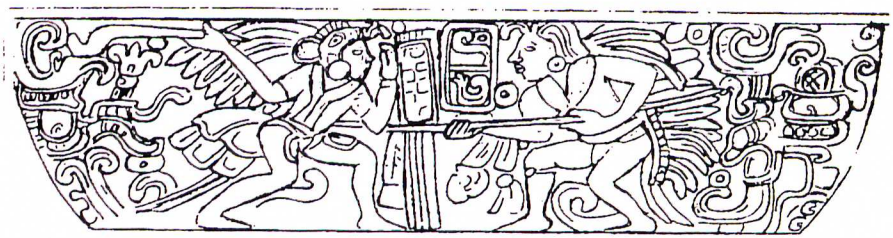


Figure 6.14 K3414 , Drawing by Cherra Wyllie

Finally, we cannot underestimate the importance of the repeated presence of these ceramics in ballcourts. Ballcourts provide a conceptual link to Classic Veracruz practices and iconography. Ballgame iconography features prominently as a theme in Rio Blanco ceramics containing square-cartouche hieroglyphs. Recall that at Tres Zapotes Molded-carved ceramics are found in the same archaeological context as stone yokes. In the neighboring Pacific coast of El Salvador, we find square cartouche hieroglyphs on stone yokes and palmas associated with the rubber ballgame. The ballgame weaves a winding trail of serendipitous clues; laid down like complex interlaces, they attract our attention, but are difficult to follow.

Preliminary Comparison Between Rio Blanco and Pabellon Ceramics

Examining the data from Rio Blanco and Pabellon wares, relationship between the types—if any—is yet to be established. General appearance and mode of production is very similar. Chemical composition for Rio Blanco ceramics is unknown, so it cannot be used in comparison with compositional analysis of Pabellon Molded-carved vessels. Yet, Veracruz-Maya connections in the diffusion of Fine Orange materials and modes of production are the subject of several decades of speculation, as well as serious archaeological inquiry and technological research.

Following the trail of Fine Orange gives us some indication of how the mechanism of its dispersal did and did not function. Initial origins of Maya fine paste pottery may extend back to the Gulf Coast Preclassic Period (Rands, Bishop, and Sabloff 1982:322-323; Adams 1971:136). Early Classic fine paste pottery from Tortuguero, Tabasco and orange paste figurines in deposits at Palenque both lie beyond the range of expected chemical composition for Fine Orange Ware (Rands, Bishop, and Sabloff 1982:323); while early fine paste wares from Early Classic Kaminaljuyu and Tikal have never been chemically analyzed, even though these are thought to be imported from the Tabasco-Gulf Coast region (ibid).

Early in the Late Classic period we see the appearance of Maya Fine Orange (ibid). Early Fine Gray wares show up in relatively the same time frame, probably originating outside the Tabasco-Usumacinta region (Rands, Bishop, and Sabloff:324). Less is known about untempered orange-paste pottery. The Ulum Incised Type dated to C.E. 670-710 at Tikal is thought to be a forerunner to later Z or Balancan Fine Orange

(Rands, Bishop, and Sabloff: 325 [Coggins 1975:276-278, 292]). Unfortunately, little early Fine Orange has been analyzed (Rands, Bishop, and Sabloff: 326).

Altar Fine Orange, as we earlier noted, appears in the Terminal Classic horizon (Rands, Bishop, and Sabloff:336). Yet there are strong indications suggesting that the homeland of this tradition was downstream on the Usumacinta in the direction of the Gulf Coast (ibid).

Sabloff, Graham, Adams, and others noted observable "foreign" traits in the iconography of Pabellon Molded-carved wares. These traits corresponded to similar "non Maya" elements in the late phase carved stelae at Seibal, Jimbal, and Ucanal. Detecting Gulf Coast origins for intrusive symbols and pictorial elements, archaeologists sought answers in the temporal and geographic dispersal of Fine Orange.

In tracking Fine Orange ceramics, archaeologists focused attentions on the diffusion of constituent materials. Modified mold-made ceramics offer another, yet unexplored trail in the transmition of ideas, aesthetics, and technology. Ancient Veracruz artisans created these distinctive wares from a variety of untempered clays including the Fine Relief Blackwares noted from El Tajin. Ceramic artists no doubt used the best locally available natural resources for creating regional manifestations of popular stylistic forms. Therefore, tracing the spread of bowls and vases with mold-pressed and modified scenes *in conjunction with* untempered fine paste wares narrows the scope, specifically with regard to the diffusion of hieroglyphic and symbolic information.

The Pacific Coast

Escuintla and Tisquisate Wares

One final ceramic type deserves mention: The Tisquisate or Escuintla pottery tradition of Pacific coastal Guatemala. Dated to the Early to Middle Classic Period, Tisquisate wares are demonstrably earlier than Late Classic Rio Blanco pottery or Terminal Classic Pabellon Molded-carved Fine Orange. Tisquisate vessel forms and iconography exhibit discernable Teotihuacan influence. Hieroglyphs on Tisquisate vases have diagnostic features distinguishing them from the script forming the basis of this study. This writing appears to be a continuation of conventions established at Late Preclassic Kaminaljuyu.

Tisquisate pottery warrants our attentions specifically because its narrative offers "Classic Veracruz" style and iconography at a prodigiously early date. As such it challenges our notions of the directional flow of such influences—which are generally attributed to the Gulf Coast. Moreover, Tisquisate images reinforce a crucial link between the Pacific Coastal Plain and Veracruz-Tabasco—the "Isthmian" cultural corridor whose presence emerges in the Formative Period in shared properties of early writing, style, and iconography.

The eclectic fusion of Teotihuacan and "Veracruz" stylistic traits and symbols appear contemporaneously at Cerro de las Mesas in the Mixtequilla. Like the Classic Lowland Maya, the Isthmian cultures merged Teotihuacan symbolic vocabulary with local form and visual expressions, thus integrating the cache of that city's extraordinary wealth and power.

Escuintla and Tisquisate wares have been the subject of studies by Edwin Shook and Nicholas Hellmuth (Hellmuth 1975). Unfortunately, none of this material comes out of stratigraphic contexts, but rather originates from surface finds connected with salvage operations, or resides in private collections. Shook established temporal contexts on the basis of style, and comparisons with excavated material elsewhere in the area (ibid).

I will contain my discussion to a certain subset of these pots—wide cylindrical vases balanced on slab-foot tripod supports. Scenes on these vessels depict animated ballgame rituals. Were it not for the shape of the vessels and the co-existence of similar vessels with clearly identifiable Teotihuacan iconography we might logically conclude that we were looking at Late or Terminal Classic material. Scroll and ballgame motifs suggest connections with Cotzumalhuapa on the Pacific Coast, as well as El Tajin and elsewhere in the Mixtequilla-Tuxtlas area of Veracruz.

Figure 6.15 Tiquisate tripod vase, from Hellmuth 1975 (F.L.A.A.R.)

Of particular note is the ballgame decapitation iconography featured on an unprovenienced Tisquisate cylindrical vase. Seven bloody serpents emerge flume-like

from the headless torso. The skull of the sacrified ballplayer resides in the large rubber ball to the left of the unfortunate victim. The ritual by several account depicts macabre practices associated with a Late or Terminal Classic ballgame cult. We find similar scenes throughout southeastern Mesoamerica during the transition spanning the Late Classic to Early Postclassic: on ballgame relief panels at El Tajin and Chichen Itza, the stone stelae of El Parasio, Veracruz and Cotzumalhuapa, or depicted on the wall paintings of Las Higueras, Veracruz. These and other iconographic correspondences between realms of the ancient Maya and Classic Veracruz alert us that there is a deep-seated connection between Veracruz and the Pacific Coast. Unfortunately, these enticing wares lack stratigraphic contexts and have never been analyzed chemically. At present, we can do little more than note their presence.

Figure 6.16 Tiquisate decapitation scene from Hellmuth 1975

Chapter Seven
Diagnostic Attributes of Ancient Mesoamerican Scripts

Sometime around the years C.E. 700-900, in the time period scholars refer to as the Epiclassic, something peculiar takes place throughout Mesoamerica. Patterns of established predictability neatly defining the cultural domains of Central Mexico, the Maya Lowlands, and Oaxaca during the Classic Period suddenly turn on end. The scale of endemic warfare is evidenced in newly fortified sites. Lines between semi-autonomous ethnic and geographic areas hopelessly blur. Things get messy.

At sites like Chichen Itza, in the Lower Temple of the Jaguars we see what appear to be Mexicans. Their pectorals resemble those worn by the *Atlantids* at Tula, Hidalgo, a place hundreds of miles away across a rugged stretch of terrain, where *caryatid*-style sculptural columns stand above a temple nearly identical to the Temple of the Warriors at Chichen Itza. At the same time in Central Mexico, recognizably Maya figures adorn the walls of Xochicalco and Cacaxtla. A strange, unexpected inversion has taken place. To further complicate the picture, elements from the Gulf Coast Classic and Oaxaca have been thrown into this new "international" eclecticism.

The nature of writing during this period is likewise enigmatic. In the Maya region Long Count dates are no longer recorded on carved monuments. An assortment of seemingly "Central Mexican" hieroglyphs appears at Chichen Itza. In carved programs associated with religious and civic architecture, pictorial narrative begins to supplant hieroglyphic texts.

Earlier in Central Mexico during the Classic Period the glyphs at Teotihuacan (discussed below) barely distinguish themselves from their pictorial program, serving as a

kind of caption. Use of script is minimal, frequently conveyed by a single hieroglyph; text subordinate to more dominant image. Then, in the twilight of Teotihuacan's demise, a new sort of inscription appears in Central Mexico at the site of Xochicalco—glyphic columns independent of accompanying pictorial representation—apparent dates, names, and events in linear sequence. But one could argue not an entirely *new* type of inscription, only new to central Mexico, for such inscriptions existed in the realms of the Maya, Zapotec, and the Mixe-Zoquean traditions of the Gulf Coast.

In the Valley of Oaxaca, as elsewhere in Mesoamerica, Zapotec script dissipates dramatically after the 10th Century C.E. (Urcid 1992:2). The exact relationship between ancient Zapotec writing and other forms of writing that followed is ambiguous. Zapotec and later Mixtec scripts, for example, undoubtedly reflect different underlying principles (ibid). The social processes at play after the Classic collapse are nowhere more mysterious than in the Valley of Oaxaca, and here, too, the form and function of writing and symbolic communication markedly changes.

The appearance of writing in Veracruz also undergoes a major transformation during the last phases of the Classic Period. Ruler portraits accompanied by historic text read in single glyphic columns (such as we see at Cerro de las Mesas or La Mojarra) discontinue in favor of lively scenes of ritual procession augmented by hieroglyphic captions. Grouped panels or registers convey sequential scenes in which we are guided through the story by the device of pictorial images.

During this transitional time the nature and appearance of writing changes nearly everywhere. What are the origins of these varied scripts? What are their diagnostic

characteristics? How can we differentiate one form of writing from another? How are such systems related?

In this chapter I examine the attributes of Mesoamerican hieroglyphic scripts and the trajectory of these scripts over time. In the first section of the chapter I look at the historic framework; in the second part I survey the temporal matrix of the last stages of the Classic Period. Using the joint venues of space and time I locate Late Classic writing in Veracruz, establishing its defining properties. I continue this process in the next chapter, which is devoted to examining writing specifically in Veracruz. Laying these foundations, I go on to analyze the script forming the basis of this study in the subsequent chapters (9-12).

Part One: The Context of Time
An Historic Framework

Exactly how many writing systems existed in ancient Mesoamerica? Where did writing originate and how did it spread over time and terrain? In *Mesoamerican Writing Systems* (1992) Joyce Marcus identifies four major traditions: Zapotec, Mixtec, Mayan, and Aztec. There are inherent problems in her scheme. Since Aztec and Mixtec are known only from Postclassic contexts (Marcus 1992:31), it becomes difficult to link them to any chronology. Marcus' book offers us little information for understanding writing during the Epiclassic or Terminal Classic periods. In the absence of chronology, we must presuppose that Aztec and Mixtec pictorial writing either developed independently or are types reconstituted from one or more earlier traditions. If we accept the latter, we then need to reconstruct the nature and identity of those earlier Mesoamerican scripts. Only in this way can we identify the various forms of writing present during the transitional years following the Classic collapse and how these scripts developed. Once a chronological

framework is proposed, we can view later traditions by exploring their placement within an historic continuum. In effect we "work backwards" from known historic contexts in our identification and decipherment process.

The question then, becomes exactly *how* to identify the chronological development of writing and semiotic systems, indeed how to identify the nature of an independently invented system in contrast to writing as the product of direct or stimulus-related diffusion. In cases where we have ethno-historic accounts or hieroglyphic decipherment, we can link phonetic writing and visual symbolism with spoken language. In cases where the ethnic and linguistic identities of the people who produced these texts are ambiguous, the process of reconstructing language through the medium of writing becomes tentative at best. Moreover, without knowing the historic context of a script, such identifications are merely speculative. Additionally, we must keep in mind that it is possible for people from widely differing linguistic groups or cultural and ethnic identities to adopt the same (or similar) script. Conversely, closely related linguistic and ethnic groups can and do use systems of writing whose visual form or organization are distinctly different.

In Figure 7.1 we see *Coca Cola*® rendered in a variety of related fonts. We "read" the scripts based solely on the graphological characteristics of the typeface. Each of the scripts represents an autonomous writing system; these writing systems, in turn, encode unrelated spoken languages. We recognize the words written in the script—*Coca Cola*--through a diagnostic style. The distinctive style serves as a sort of symbol or logogram from which we derive meaning.

Serbian and Croatian are nearly identical Indo-European languages (often referred to as Serbo-Croatian). Until recently both coexisted in the same country--Yugoslavia. Serbian is written using the Cyrillic alphabet, while Croatian employs the Roman alphabet (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000). Conversely, Siddham letterforms--used to graphically represent Sanskrit--eventually influenced the development of writing in various parts of India, Tibet, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia (Stevens 1995). As such they represent discrete languages using a related script. We can also look at the Napata and Meroitic writing systems of Nubia and Sudan, sharing many of the same hieroglyphic signs of earlier Egyptian writing, yet in all three hieroglyphic scripts, glyphs represent different phonetic values. In Meroë, for example, hieroglyphs are alphabetic rather than syllabic (as in Egyptian hieroglyphic writing).

Tracing language and meaning systems solely by visual correspondences is problematic. Before the phonetic decipherment of Maya hieroglyphic writing, Sir Eric Thompson established visual typologies of individual hieroglyphs in his treatise on the

subject—*A Catalogue of Maya Hieroglyphs* (Thompson 1962). Although this system has certain advantages in providing a purely visual organization and scheme of reference (particularly in un-deciphered writing systems where spoken language is unknown), visual forms often operate entirely independently from their encoded or embedded meanings. The same sign can have *entirely different* meanings or sound associations in different times and in different places. Consider, for example, footprints that have a logographic function on Olmec La Venta Monument 13 (Coe 1976: 111-112; Justeson 1985:35; Marcus 1992: 41-42), while footprint markings from the lower registers of several Teotihuacan murals—in this context supplementing pictorial narrative by indicating directional movement—are thought to be semasiographic. Accompanying Aztec images, Hans Prem (Prem 1992:58) describes these as "verbs that describe action or processes." Yet, such "verbs" are implied in the use of the sign, rather than being linguistic. John Justeson (personal communication) suggests that within the writing systems of Xochicalco and the Zapotecs, footprints possibly function as locatives. In Maya hieroglyphic writing the footprint icon serves as syllabic *be* (Harris and Stearns 1997).

7.2a

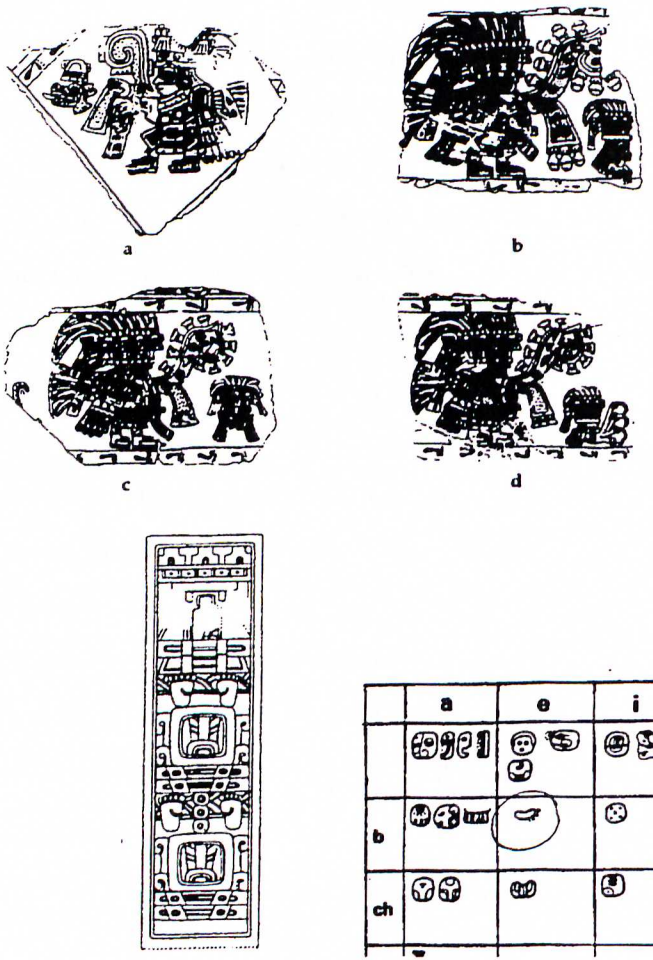


Figure 7.2 Footprints in several ancient Mesoamerican scripts including Olmec (7.2a), Teotihuacan (7.2b), Xochicalco (7.2c) and Maya (7.2d).

If hieroglyphic decipherment is contingent on knowledge of spoken language, and we cannot be sure that visual symbols alone convey meaning cross-culturally, how can

we extract those relationships existing between Mesoamerican writing and semiotic systems?

I suggest that it is necessary to examine the existence (or in some cases the non-existence) of components common to a wide range of Mesoamerican writing systems. These include: 1) Day signs within the 260-day ritual calendar, 2) Solar year-bearer signs and associated year-bearer sets, 3) The numeration system (properties and structure of bar and dot numerals), 4) Aspects of phoneticism, 5) Linguistic structure (when known), 6) Use or absence of Long Count dates, 7) Calendar Round dates, 8) Iconographic conventions, 9) Length of text, as well as sequence and structure of the signs employed, 10) Reading order and directionality, 11) Use of toponyms, 12) Style of nominative glyphs. These diagnostic traits both individually and collectively provide controlled contexts for recognizing independently testable sign qualities and comparative frequencies. Temporal sequence should also be discernable. My objective here is to establish a framework for comparison. Without such a framework it is meaningless to examine Late Classic Veracruz writing in relationship to other Mesoamerican writing systems.

Few scholars have undertaken the challenge of writing any sort of synthesis on Mesaomerican writing systems. In his letters to Jean-Françoise Champollion in 1832 Constantine Rafinesque-Schmaltz (2001: 46-47) noted the wide range of attributes in ancient American scripts. To this end he established twelve categories of graphic systems ranging "from the most simple to the most complex" (ibid). Despite several false

assumptions—understandable given the time in which he lived—Rafinesque-Schmaltz writes—

> "3. It is false that no American nations had systems of writing, glyphs, and letters. Several had various modes of perpetuating ideas.
> 4. There were several such graphic systems in America to express ideas; all of which find equivalents in the east continent."

In spite of his convictions, shared by John Lloyd Stephens and others, hieroglyphic decipherment of ancient American writing did not take place for over a hundred years, and then most of the attention was devoted to Maya hieroglyphic writing. Ironically, Mayanists frequently tout the Maya hieroglyphic system as the only "true writing" in the hemisphere, dismissing other scripts in much the same terms that retarded earlier decipherment of Mayan writing. Other scholars argue the relative merits (or even legitimacy) or various types of Mesoamerican writing. As a result (as in the field of human evolution) there are "lumpers" and "splitters;" those who see a few writing systems, and others who see many. Marcus (1992), as mentioned, recognizes four major traditions in her book on Mesoamerican writing systems, which appear to be linked to writing systems still in use at the time of the Conquest. Therefore, the volume is only a partial and somewhat generalized treatise on the subject. On the other end of the spectrum, Munro Edmunson (1992) recognizes thirteen separate writing systems, all with their own day sign symbols in the 260-day sacred calendar. Edmunson's writing systems (154-167) include 1) Tilantongo, 2) Totonac, 3) Huastec, 4) Tarascan, 5) Toltec, 6) Cholula, 7) Xochicalco, 8) Nuine, 9) Teotihuacan, 10) Olmec, 11) Olmec 2, 12) Zapotec, and 13) Maya. Munro's categories do not specifically include Aztec and Mixtec, regarded as principal systems by Marcus (1992).

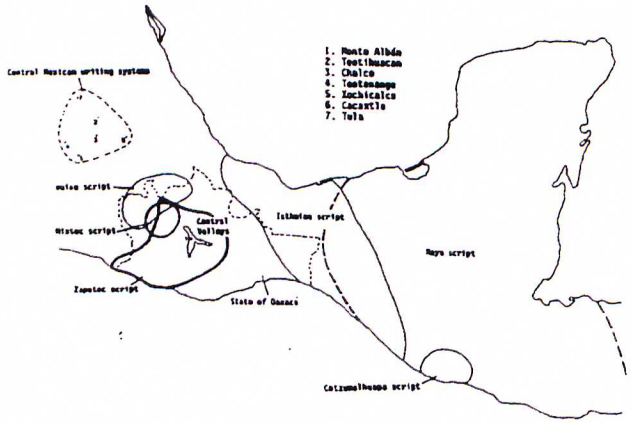


Figure 7.3 Map showing distribution of major Mesoamerican writing systems, from Urcid 1992

A significant treatment on the development of Mesoamerican writing systems and the relationships between them comes out of the ongoing work of epigrapher and archaeologist Javier Urcid Serrano. Urcid (1992) began examining possible developmental relationships between early Mesoamerican writing systems in his Yale doctoral dissertation on *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*. He has gone on to do important work on the recognition and decipherment of the Nuiñe and Xochicalco hieroglyphic writing systems. Michael Coe and Justin Kerr additionally offer an excellent treatment on the origins and development of Mesoamerican scripts in *The Art of the Maya Scribe* (Coe and Kerr 1998).

I indicate in Chapter 2 that there is no shared definition for writing, as such. This lack of consensus adds to the difficulty in providing any broad treatment of the topic. Among Mesoamerican scholars John Justeson (Justeson 1986) describes writing as -- "Graphic representational systems whose encoding and decoding of information make crucial reference to language." Elizabeth Hill Boone (Boone 1990, 2000; Boone and Mignolo 1994) adopts what she calls "an inclusive definition of writing," entailing in the

broadest sense "the communication of relatively specific ideas in a conventional manner by means of permanent, visible marks." Language is the crucial reference in Justeson's definition, while Boone emphasizes the visual conveyance of ideas. The range between these definitions harkens back to our theoretical considerations in Chapter 2: Is "writing" the domain of linguistics or art? Apropos of this polarity, Justeson, who holds forth the centrality of language, is a linguist; while Boone, embracing the encoding of ideas through "permanent, visual marks," is an art historian.

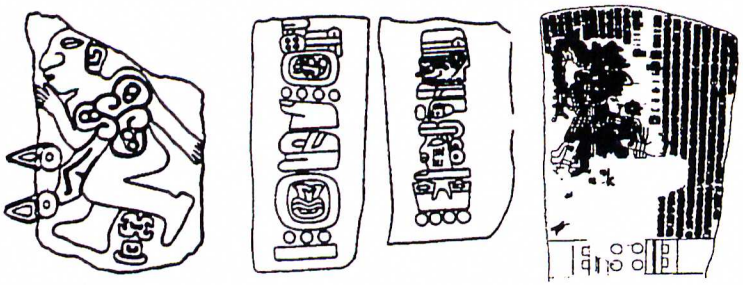
What becomes evident is that scripts may or may not encode *spoken language*. Whether we want to call all scripts "writing" or not is to a large degree a semantic preference. Since semasiographic symbolism in some cases evolves into glottographic signs encoding specific language (and vice versa), both types of script are relevant to our discussion.

Earliest Writing in Mesoamerica

Mesoamerican writing originated during the Formative or Preclassic Period. We find what appear to be logographic signs present throughout the Middle PreClassic Period-- foundations stemming from Olmec iconography. Michael Coe (Coe and Kerr 1998) refers to this complex iconographic symbolism as "a kind of *pars pro toto* (part for the whole) writing." Codified iconography eventually gave way to graphic forms symbolizing linguistic information, which John Justeson (Justeson 1986) classifies as "incipient writing."

In southern Veracruz, Long Count dates emerge from these early Olmec roots by 32 B.C.E. (Coe 1994:75-76), yet even earlier at about 600-500 B.C.E., in the Valley of

Oaxaca, San Jose Mogote Stela 3 incorporates a day name in the 260-day Mesoamerican ritual calendar (Coe and Kerr 1998); Coe 1994:81-82; Marcus 1992: 35-38). Robert Cahn and Marcus Winter contest the accuracy of the date, which they believe is too early on both stylistic and stratigraphic grounds (Coe and Kerr 1998: 64).



7.4a 7.4b 7.4c

Figure 7.4 Earliest examples of Mesoamerican writing from San Mogote (7.4a), Monte Alban (7.4b) and La Mojarra (7.4c).

The earliest example of what Joyce Marcus calls "pure text" appears on Stelae 12 and 13 in Building L at Monte Alban (ca 500-400 B.C.E.), displaying a column of consecutive hieroglyphs (Marcus 1992: 38-41) which presumably incorporate different components of information (interpreted by some accounts as year signs, verbs, non-calendric compound glyphs, day sign cartouches, and names) (ibid). La Venta Monument 13 from Tabasco also contains a column of hieroglyphs, although no apparent calendrical information (Marcus 1992:41-42). Radiocarbon dates from stratigraphic Phase IV La Venta would place this monument to between 500-400 B.C.E., roughly contemporaneous with Monte Alban 1a. (ibid). In both regions, Olmec codified symbolism provided the impetus for writing, resulting in a developed signage using sequentially arranged hieroglyphs. It nevertheless remains unclear whether the Isthmian and Oaxacan writing per se evolved from common roots (Coe and Kerr 1998).

The system of Calendar Round dates accompanied by bar and dot numerals diffused from the Oaxaca highlands to the late Olmec Gulf Coast and Maya regions during the final years before the Common Era (Coe 1992:61-62). This is the same general time frame in which we see the first Long Count dates in the Olmec area (ibid; Coe 1994:74-75). By the beginning of the First Century C.E. Epi-Olmec writing incorporates multiple columns of hieroglyphic text containing dates and historic statements. On La Mojarra Stela 1 (36 C.E.) a ruler portrait accompanies these intricate texts. The Classic Maya eventually adopt this format for conveying their own dynastic history. The juxtaposition of image and text—a ruler in his finest regalia rendered in profile in relation to columns of hieroglyphic text—appears strikingly similar in both regions of southeastern Mesoamerica, even to the costumes worn by the rulers. While undoubtedly the Maya and their southern Veracruz neighbors enjoyed close relations manifest in some shared artistic conventions and religious beliefs, Maya and Epi-Olmec writing are very different. Isthmian or Epi-Olmec writing is generally credited as the forerunner of Maya script (Coe 1976; Urcid 1992:3-4).

Izapa on the Pacific Coast flourished during the same early period when ideas about time keeping were making their way across parts of Mesoamerica. At Izapa the iconographic and design programs connected with monumental art and architecture ushered in stylistic and cosmological structures forming the basis of later Classic Maya visual and material culture. Izapa style and mythological symbolism was also to profoundly influence the art and cosmology of the Gulf Coast.

In the Maya region calendric and possibly phonetic symbols added to stylistic importations from the Pacific Coast, and blended with a distinctly Maya symbolic

vocabulary already present at El Mirador and Cerros. The Maya apparently reformulated these outside influences into their unique and complex form of hieroglyphic writing.

Surveying these early manifestations of writing we can see that Mesoamerican writing evolved along three separate developmental trajectories connected with three major geographic regions: Oaxaca, the Yucatan Peninsula, and the Gulf Coast, and affiliated with the Zapotec, Maya, and "Olmec", respectively. During the Classic Period a form of writing also developed in the Valley of Mexico, apparently at the great ancient city of Teotihuacan itself. Urcid (1992:3) suggests that Zapotec writing provided an important impetus for the script at Teotihuacan as well as other related forms in the Southwestern and Central Highlands of Mesoamerica. We find Teotihuacan glyphs principally in the contexts of wall painting programs and decorative ceramic elements. Teotihuacan writing, like later Aztec and Mixtec systems, primarily functions to provide captions for pictorial programs. James Langley refers to these as *notational signs,* stating that—

> "Notational signs are small, conventional depictions of natural objects or abstract motifs. They are usually associated with other graphic imagery but, unlike the attributive codes, are easily distinguished as incongruous elements in the graphic convention. Pictorially they are out of place, have no obvious naturalistic or decorative function, but serving rather as symbolic supplements to the imagery...Notational signs tend to cluster in patterns that display the sorts of uniformity and variability characteristic of glyphic communications" (Langley 1993:132).

Teotihuacan hieroglyphs or notational signs have been studied by Clara Millon (1973), Esther Pasztory (1988), James Langley (1993), and Karl Taube (1999; 2001). In 1988, Langley identified a notational corpus of 120 signs. Several of these signs seem to serve as affixes to other signs "in a way that appears to qualify them" (Langley 1993:132-

133). It is not known whether these affixes, or even the main signs they apparently modify, incorporate any phonetic component, particularly in light of the fact that scholars still do not know what language or languages were spoken at Teotihuacan (Langley:134).

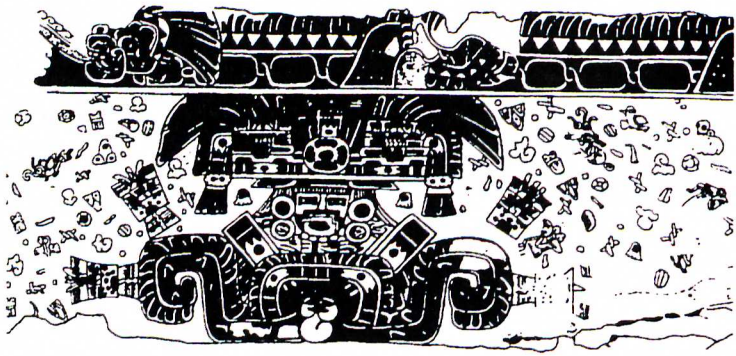


Figure 7.5 Los Glifos Mural, Teotihuacan, from Langley,

The Feathered Serpents and Flowering Trees mural offers possible evidence of toponyms (ibid; Pasztory 1996; Taube 1999:7). The sign corpus also includes calendrical notation (Langley 1993: 134; Taube 1999:6). Logograms can be seen in pictographic elements such as footprint patterns and speech scrolls (Taube 1999: 11; 30-33). While these denote action, they can scarcely be called verbs from a linguistic standpoint. Karl Taube points out that glyphic elements placed in association with these symbols, such as seen on the Portico 2 Murals at Tepantitla, modify the sound or content of the sign.

The main question dividing scholars is whether signs and symbols at Teotihuacan represent a semasiographical system using the iconic units of culturally-encoded images, pictographs, or ideographs (Urcid 1999:5), or rather have the capacity to "convey any and all thought" (ibid). Langley appears to conclude that Teotihuacan hieroglyphs are not language-specific. He contrasts it with writing in other Mesoamerican cultural areas—

> "The conclusion to be drawn from this evidence is that, while Teotihuacan notation contains many echoes of the sign systems used elsewhere in

> Mesoamerica and fulfilled a variety of functions, this notation made limited use of the sort of linear sign sequences that are the essence of traditional writing systems. In particular, nothing indicates any interest in emulating Maya or Zapotec literacy" (Langely 1993:137).

Taube takes the latter position, citing examples of what he calls linear texts. Two of his examples of sequential hieroglyphs come from the city itself—reproduced by Taube from drawings at the Plaza de los Glifos at La Ventilla (Taube 1999: 35-36), the other a mural fragment from Tetitla Corridor 12 (ibid). He derives his other supporting examples from portable objects, or monumental sculpture found in other cultural contexts. The stylistic attributes clearly show Teotihuacan influence.

Therefore, while we might concede that some linear texts survive in the corpus of Teotihuacan inscriptions, their use was by most indications limited. The evolution of hieroglyphic writing was multidirectional (Urcid 1992:9). Scripts adopted a variety of properties through their exposure to writing systems elsewhere. These adaptations are in evidence during the apparent cultural overhaul characterizing the Classic collapse. Yet Teotihuacan writing exhibits a function and form exerting the greatest discernable influence on Toltec, Aztec, and to a large degree Mixtec writing, as well as Mixteca-Puebla style that was to become the Postclassic standard in most of Mesoamerica.

The final inheritors of Teotihuacan-style image and text were the Aztecs or Mexica. Aztec writing has received in-depth analyses by Prem (1992), Umberger (1981), Brotherston (1995), and Boone (1994 and 1999). The Aztecs did not limit themselves to conveying language *as it is spoken,* instead they used multivalent pictorial constructs as a means to communicate ideas. French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1976:3) tells us that "the concept of language exceeds and comprehends that of speech." While several scholars dismiss semasiographic writing as a lesser form of visual semiotic

communication, non-speech based sign and notational systems provide cross-cultural meaning systems-- manifest, for example, in our own mathematical symbols or musical notations (Boone 1994:3-26). Aztec and Mixtec writing systems incorporate glyphic logographs, ideograms, place names, personal names, calendric information, and elements of phoneticism. Yet, as with Teotihuacan glyphs, such notation is generally (if not always) subordinate to the image. The image, in other words, forms the main body of the "text." Glyphs act as captions to pictorial narration or provide layers of embedded meaning within the symbolic complexity of pictorial iconography.

At Teotihuacan the images, like the accompanying glyphic signs, are essentially non-linear; they are *hypertexts* rather than offering a flow of visual narrative. The descendent forms (e.g. Aztec and Mixtec) incorporate more in the way of sequential story telling. On the Teotihuacan murals we see self-contained scenes, generally devoid of such sequence. Glyphs and symbols frequently float in no apparent order, in a format that is designed, but not composed, as seen on the Tepantitla murals. When longer, more linear texts do appear, they do so within the setting or format of other cultural contexts—adopting the structure of the host culture.

Orientation and directionality also differentiate Central Mexican semasiographic scripts (such as Teotihuacan, Mixtec, and Aztec) from logo-phonetic hieroglyphic writing. In Maya hieroglyphic writing, for example, reading order counters the orientation of profiled hieroglyphic symbols depicting human and animal heads, body parts, or full figures. The rule of thumb being that one "reads into the faces" of hieroglyphic profiles. Henry G. Fischer first identified this principle in relation to Egyptian hieroglyphic writing (Fischer 1986, 1989). Maya hieroglyphs, like their ancient

Egyptian counterparts, maintained their essential pictorial form, creating extraordinary interplay between image and text. Inexplicably, where hieroglyphic scripts encode spoken language—such as Hittite, Linear B, ancient Egyptian, and Mayan—the eye runs counter to the profiled heads and figures of glyphic humans and animals (this principle being "inexplicable" since New World hieroglyphic writing developed independently from its Old World counterparts). Hieroglyphs encode narrative embodied in the linearity of speech. And while systems eventually adopt a preferred orientation and reading order (left to right or right to left, for example), the placement of mirror-image hieroglyphs within a textual sequence reverses the directionality of the reading order. Yet the underlying principle remains the same—the viewer "reads into" the faces of hieroglyphic symbols.

As we learn in Chapter 2, writing introduces the sequential linearity of speech into the visual domain of imagery. Thus, we can identify writing that encodes spoken language by: 1) reading order and directionality, 2) sequential hieroglyphs, 3) substitutions within the glyphic sequence or structure, and 4) the use of affixes or determinatives. Mayan writing fulfils these criteria.

Teotihuacan hieroglyphs seldom, if ever, exhibit linear sequence. Pictorial programs lack sustained narrative. While occasionally footprints and figures seem to move along roads or pathways in a given direction, we never see events segregated by time or space. Each action is relegated to the eternal present; motion encapsulated in a frieze frame. Nothing in the art or hieroglyphs of Teotihuacan implies a notion of recorded history.

I believe that the lack of clear narrative sequence in the art and hieroglyphs at Teotihuacan combine to convey a civilization devoid of logo-phonetic writing. This absence in part may have been tempered by exposure to contemporaneous writing systems in Veracruz, Oaxaca, and the Maya region.

The pictographic paintings, relief carvings, and screenfold books of Aztec and Mixtec, on the other hand, relegate the linearity of oral traditions and story telling onto the visual realm of the picture plane. Toltec, Mixtec, and Aztec art form the progeny of earlier conventions at Teotihuacan. Such art is almost wholly dependent on images, whether symbolic or representational. Yet Mixteca-Puebla scribal artists show the unmistakable influence of literate cultures. The reader follows figures through broad expanses of time and space through a series of actions framed within the registers of groundlines and sky borders. These devises funnel the eye, directing the viewer through sequences of creation mythology, royal intrigues, or genealogical history.

Art becomes sequential with the introduction of writing that encodes speech, which is, in turn, a linear modality of the thought process. Yet hieroglyphic symbols of the Mixtec and Aztec do not record spoken language. Therefore we must assume that here *exposure to* written and pictorial narrative profoundly transforms the appearance, structure, and function of pictorial imagery. Writing with a series of pictures, rather than words, comes after the appearance the logo-syllabic scripts.

Returning to the idea of directionality and orientation we receive another important visual clue that these late Central Mexican forms are not basically phonetic. Recall that in hieroglyphic scripts encoding spoken language we "read into the faces" of profiled figures. Conversely in the Aztec and Mixtec codices we follow the nose and

orientation of profiled figures. The characters guide us through the clearly marked avenues of guidelines. We flow through the flatly rendered scenes, and while we don't always understand the exotic symbolism or hallucinogenic imagery, we nevertheless can negotiate the terrain. The roads are clearly marked, faintly familiar to us from our exposure to comics and picture books. In many cases picture books are our first stories, brought to life by the sound of a human voice. These are so much a part of our developmental experience growing up in a literate culture that it is nearly intuitive to imagine that stories in pictures existed before the written word. Yet I can think of no example where two-dimensional pictures function as clear, sequential narrative in pre-literate cultures. Certainly image and form provided mnemonic aids or props for story telling before the advent of writing. These devises required activation by gesture, dance, song, or speech; they were dependent on the transmission of culture from one generation to the next.

By the end of the Classic Period cultures in Central Mexico and the Valley of Oaxaca use several Teotihuacan conventions, while also incorporating new traditions of pictorial narrative. These traditions have antecedents in Maya mural painting, Zapotec genealogies, and in Classic Veracruz architectural relief sculpture. Portable objects such as painted books and narrative decoration on painted or molded-carved ceramics probably also profoundly influenced later developments.

The form and function of writing in Early Classic Central Mexico was fundamentally different in character from the other Mesoamerican writing systems of Zapotec in Oaxaca, the Mixe-Zoquean peoples of the Gulf Coast, or the Classic Maya.

This distinction is key to understanding the nature of some of the changes that took place during the Late Classic-Early Postclassic transition.

Part Two: The Context of Space
MESOAMERICAN WRITING DURING THE EPICLASSIC PERIOD

Having identified four trajectories of semi-independent development of writing in Mesoamerica, I shall now address the nature of writing in each region during the Late Classic-Early Postclassic transition. I want to remind the reader that in many cases lack of secure dates and chronological controls makes it difficult to pinpoint or precisely correlate the exact dates when changes in writing occur. Moreover, scholars assign different terms—"Late Classic," "Epiclassic," "Terminal Classic"—to describe the same social process at play at roughly the same time period, but in different regions.

Of the four areas discussed below the Maya provide us with a written language which epigraphers can now confidently read as spoken language. Scholars like Javier Urcid (Urcid Serrano 1992), John Justeson, and Terence Kauffman (Justeson and Kaufman 2001; Justeson and Mathews 1990; Kaufman and Justeson 2001) have made substantial contributions in the areas of Zapotec, Nuine, and Xochicalco hieroglyphic decipherment. Justeson and Kauffman offer a linguistic decipherment of Epi-Olmec inscriptions (which include hieroglyphic texts from Cerro de las Mesas); a system encoding Mixe-Zoquean, a language used by people of the southern Veracruz-Tabasco coastal plain. Certain epigraphers, like Stephen Houston, challenge the success of this decipherment. Depending on the reader's position on this point, there are two ancient American hieroglyphic scripts that can be read in part or whole.

Maya Writing

Of the four geographic regions discussed in this and the subsequent chapter, the Maya region is the only area where we have an uncontested hieroglyphic decipherment, due to extraordinary breakthroughs during the past thirty years (see Coe 1992).

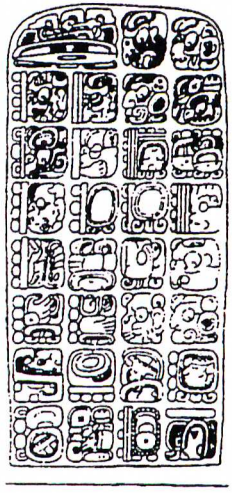


Figure 7.6 Piedras Negras ST 36. Drawing by John Montgomery.

Classic Maya writing provides us with reading order (temporal-verb-object-subject or T-V-O-S) (Stearns and Harris 1997:165) within a combined phonetic-logographic system. Glyph blocks are read in columns of two in a left to right, top to bottom direction. In addition to parts of speech and hieroglyphs conveying syllabic values, the Maya inscriptions offer us substantial calendric and astronomical information. Bar and dots convey numerals, with bars (representing five) rendered as an elongated rectangle. Maya inscriptions provide us with both Long Count dates and Calendar Round dates. Since the rendering of hieroglyphs uses many of the same pictorial conventions as images associated with them, we frequently see a fundamental interplay between text and

image. Nevertheless, text can and most often does function independently from pictorial image. Therefore, in both function and appearance, Maya hieroglyphic writing contrasts significantly with the writing at Teotihuacan, or the image-based systems of the Postclassic pictorial manuscript traditions.

Classic Maya writing was still actively in use in most Lowland Maya sites throughout the 8th Century of the Common Era, and on into the 9th Century. Changes in the rendering of hieroglyphic inscriptions occur at some sites by the early to middle part of the 800's. This transition corresponds to the collapse of many major Classic Maya cities, and heralds the beginning of a new order in about C.E. 830. This time frame, alternatively known as the Terminal Classic, sees the emergence of new centers at Chichen Itza and Seibal (both discussed below). Throughout the Maya region we see the last Long Count dates recorded in the first part of the Tenth Century C.E. (Coe 1993:128).

In the early stages of this transformation process the Lowland Maya were experiencing the apogee of their civilization. This is important to bear in mind since the Classic Maya apogee and collapse both occur well within the parameters of the so-called "Epiclassic" time frame of C.E. 700-900. Actual chronological dates are what allow patterns of sequence and contemporaneity. Cultural phases often imply chronological sequences that have no basis in secure dates. For example, the "Late Classic" Maya site of Bonampak and the "Epiclassic" site of Cacaxtla in Central Mexico both flourished in about C.E. 790. Corresponding styles, subject matter, and materials used in the wall paintings at both places make even more sense when we realize that the sites were

contemporaneous, rather than imagining an "Epiclassic" Cacaxtla coming into being sometime after the "Late Classic" Bonampak!

The so-called "Terminal Classic" (ca. C.E. 800-1000) marks the real transformation in Maya conventions. In northern Yucatan at the site of Chichen Itza Maya writing takes on a new appearance and structure, while retaining many familiar elements. Apparently writing also has a new purpose in this time and place. Linda Schele and David Freidel (Schele and Freidel 1990) write--

> "Chichen at its height was a capital without a public history, without the written declarations of kings embedded into its stone walls. It was a capital that turned its back on a thousand years of Maya royal practice and relegated literacy to the books of the chilanob, men who were sorcerers and prophets, but not kings. Joining the ranks of the non-literate peoples of Mesoamerica, this kingdom looked to the larger world of the Mexican and the Gulf Coast peoples for its prosperity and future. The result of the success of Chichen lords was the Mayanization of Mesoamerica."

The Maya recorded historic events during this time using a Short Count or 13-cycle *katuns*, each of which was named for its last day, which always fell on an *Ahaw* date. Duration of the Short Cycle lasted 256 ¼ years (13x 7,000 days) (Coe 1993:141). Stelae were longer erected, and themes of Underworld mythology also disappeared within the iconography (Coe 1993:128 and 136).

As stated in Chapter 3, Chronological controls at Chichen are problematic (see Lincoln 1986:140-196). The art, iconography, and glyphic symbolism vary within the site, from recognizably "Classic Maya" style forms to what appear to be Central Mexican or Gulf Coast artistic conventions, deities, and symbolism. It is even suggested that such disparate forms are contemporary (Schele and Freidel 1990:355). By some accounts "Mexican" or "Toltec" occupants resided within the boundaries of this cosmopolitan city. While the foreign population used Maya hieroglyphs, they "favored murals and sculpture

over texts" (ibid). A wall painting from the Temple of the Warriors (Figure 7.7) shows a battle between Maya and a people in Central Mexican dress, rendered with shorter proportions and less naturalistic conventions than traditionally associated with Maya art. Art historian Mary Miller (1996:188) writes-- "Stylistically, the paintings have more in common with early Teotihuacan painting than traditional Maya painting." The scribes and artists experimented with ways to convey information to people of wide ranging ethnic affiliations, and perhaps varying levels of literacy (Schele and Freidel 1990:355-360). As time passed, the dominance of image connected with Central Mexico became incorporated in Yucatec Maya public programs—

> "Unlike the kings of the south, the last divine lords of Chichen Itza chose not to use hieroglyphic texts on their stelae and buildings to proclaim their histories and triumphs. Instead these rulers pursued a magnificent architectural program of bas reliefs carved on piers, walls, pillars, and lintels. The decision to tell their story in pictures unencumbered by the written word was a deliberate one..." (Schele and Freidel 1990:349).

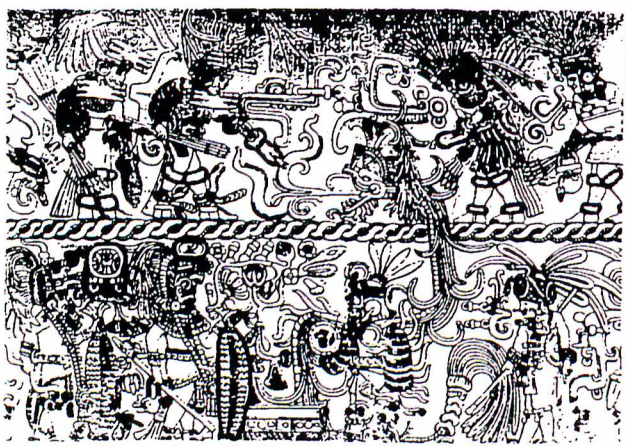


Figure 7.6 Non-Classic style figures at the Maya Temple of the Warriors, Chichen Itza

Central Mexican glyphic forms, such as the fifty-seven or more name glyphs from the Northwest Colonnade can be compared with other new Maya hieroglyphic conventions, as seen in the Chichen Itza syllabary compiled by John Harris. The Monjas and Yula carvings also convey glyphic forms distinct from those found in Classic Maya context. Yet the structure of these later inscriptions compare to Maya texts elsewhere, presenting columns of sequential texts with a linear reading order. On the other hand, the Northwest Colonnade glyphs "are carved over the human figures and...sometimes difficult to differentiate from purely decorative designs." These glyphs include birds, costume elements, astronomical symbols, and signs that may function as verbs or that incorporate phonetic or rebus principals.

Figure 7.8 Processional scene at Chichen Itza with Tajin-style hieroglyphs.

Dating to the Late to Terminal Classic period, Cotzumalhuapa has recently been the subject of ongoing research by Mexican archaeologist Oswaldo Chinchilla Mazariegos. Chinchilla is currently in the process of documenting and analyzing Cotzumalhuapa's unique writing system (Chinchilla Mazariegos: personal communication). Santa Lucia Cotzumalhuapa on the Pacific coastal plain of Guatemala had a non-Mayan speaking population. Iconography shows influence from both Central Mexico and the Gulf Coast (Coe 1993:138-139). The Cotzumalhuapans used a Mexican calendar with day names placed in round cartouches (ibid; Miller 1996:102). "Numbers

and coefficients are expressed in the Mexican fashion by dots and circles only, without the use of the bar for five so characteristic of the Maya" (Coe 1993:139).

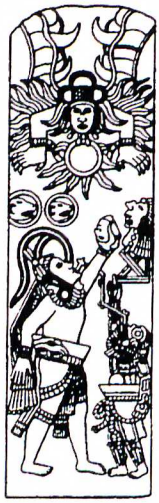


Figure 7.9 Terminal Classic stela from Cotzumalhuapa Stela

The Terminal Classic also sees the introduction of foreign signs at Seibal in Guatemala's western Peten. Square cartouche day name hieroglyphs replace Classic Maya forms on late stelae from that site. These glyphs accompany non-Classic or "foreign" characteristics appearing concurrently in Seibal's iconography. Epigrapher John Graham focused attention on Seibal's hieroglyphs during the 1970's, referring to square cartouche signs as Phase IV Non-Classic variants (Graham 1971a, b, 1973, 1990). While scholars long noted "Mexican" or "Gulf Coast" influences in Seibal's day sign conventions and iconography (R. E. W. Adams 1973; Graham 1971b, 1973, 1990; Sabloff; Sabloff and Willey 1967; Stuart 1993)) these assignations are general, lacking specific evidence for relationships or correspondences. The phrase "Mexican day sign" is ambiguous, as is "Gulf Coast influence."

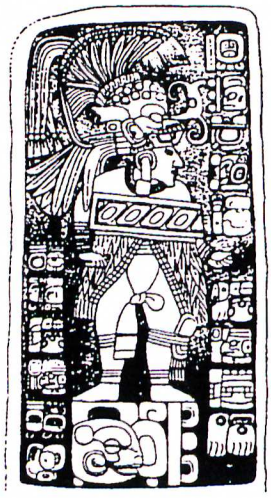


Figure 7.10a

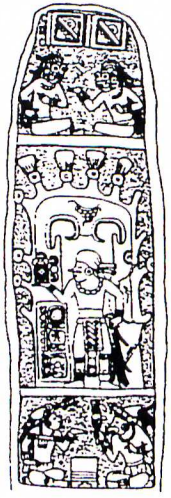


Figure 7.10b

Figure 7.10 Classic style Seibal Stela 7 (7.10a) (drawing by James Porter) and Non-Classic style Seibal Stela 3 (from John Graham).

The intrusive calendric signs appear at the Maya sites of Ucanal and Jimbal, as well as on ball game paraphernalia from Salvador and the Pacific coast. In nearly every case the script accompanying them is Classic Maya writing or perhaps a regional variant thereof.

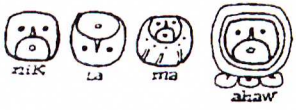
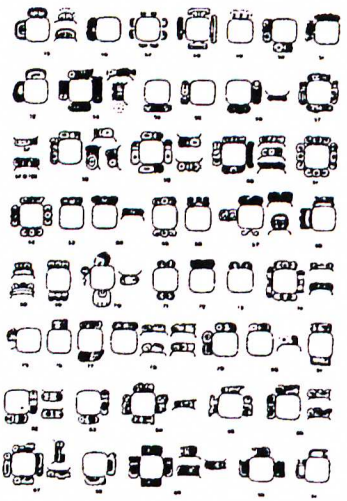


Figure 7.11 The same sign with different values depending on orientation or accompanying attributes.

"Non-Classic" or "foreign" hieroglyphs also appear on Pabellon Molded-carved Fine Orange ceramics from Guatemala's Pasion River drainage (see Chapters 6, 9, and 12). These include square cartouche day signs discussed above, as well as enigmatic non-Classic glyphs that mimic the P.S.S. and S.S.S. format found on Classic Maya *Codex Style* polychrome vases. These sequential hieroglyphs (discussed in greater detail in

Chapter 12) share many of the properties of Classic Maya hieroglyphs including the use of affixes and substitutions. As with Maya glyphs, we see certain main signs within the hieroglyphic corpus occasionally framed by a cartouche. In Classic Maya writing the presence of an outlining cartouche modifies the meaning of the hieroglyph. For example, the same sign can represent the logograph for flower (*nik*), the phonetic symbol for *ma* or *la*, or the day sign *Ahaw* within the *T'zolk'in* or 260 day Sacred Calendar—depending on context, orientation, or presence or lack of a framing device. Similarly, the Pabellon glyphs display these same properties: flexibility in orientation; the presence or lack of a cartouche along with bar and dot numerals.



7.12 Affixes

The foreign appearance and iconography on Pabellon Molded-carved Fine Orange wares captured the attentions of archaeologists working at Waxactun (Smith 1955, 1958), Seibal (Sabloff 1973; Sabloff, et al. 1982), and Altar de Sacrificios (R. Adams 1973; R. E. W. Adams 1973). Again, archaeologists applied terms like "Mexican" and "Gulf Coast" in identifying origins of the new ceramic types, as well as their hieroglyphs and

iconography. Such designations remain amorphous, since the precise "Mexican" or "Gulf Coast" culture providing the impetus for these traits is never specified.

Writing in Oaxaca

Like the Maya, the Zapotecs had a complex writing system. Similar to transformations in visual communications elsewhere in Mesoamerica, the Zapotecs increased their emphasis on pictorial representation, with text serving to supplement or modify image. During Monte Alban Period IV (C.E. 700-950) Zapotec inscriptions primarily conveyed calendrically-oriented information (Whittaker 1992:6). In earlier phases Zapotec hieroglyphic writing shared several similarities with Mayan writing. The corpus of signs includes toponyms, verbs, and dates in the 260-day sacred calendar system, year signs in the solar or 365 day count, derivative calendrical names of individuals nearly always enclosed in a round cartouche and accompanied by a coefficient of generally less than fourteen (Whittaker 1992:15). Zapotec writing contains more than 100 signs of phonetic and semantic value (Urcid: 1994), produced as an art employing conflation, substitution and inversion. Zapotec writing was a combined pictographic, logographic, ideographic, and phonetic system (Marcus 1992:72). Homophones are used in personal names and toponyms (Urcid 1992 and 1994). Using conventions also seen in the art of Teotihuacan, scrolls indicate speech or song (Miller 1996:89). Like the Maya, the Zapotec used bar and dot numerals. In addition to rectangular bars comparable to those used by the Maya and Mixe-Zoquean cultures, Zapotecs also convey bars as horizontal oblong shapes, sometimes doubled, wrapped by one or more angled, vertical bands.

Unlike the Maya and Gulf Coast cultures, the Zapotecs had no Long Count dates. From as early as the Formative Period Zapotec texts consisted of consecutively placed hieroglyphs. Texts begin with a Calendar Round date, given by a Year Bearer along with a numerical coefficient (Coe 1994:125-126). Solar year signs were formed by a headband variant (Marcus 1992:131), and later the A and O trapeze-ray symbol associated with Monte Alban. Alternating years included Lightening, Deer, Soapbrush, and Earthquake. By the Terminal Classic Period Zapotec writing existed as a mere shadow of its former complexity. Gordon Whittaker suggests that this "devolution" might have been the result of influence from Teotihuacan and "the perception of iconography as a universally interpretable medium" (Whittaker 1992:6-7).

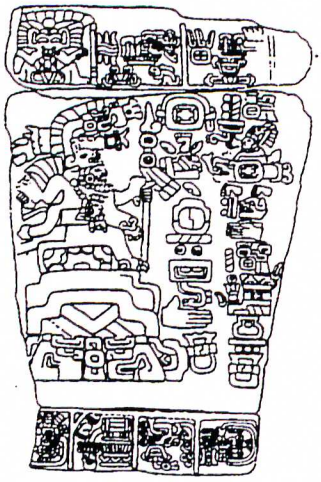


Figure 7.13 Zapotec writing. Monte Alban SP 1 from Urcid 1992.

Following Monte Alban's apogee, themes of Zapotec writing shifted from state affairs and the taking of captives to increased interest in royal genealogy (Marcus

1992:70). Monuments were read in a boustrophedon sequence, like the later Mixtec codices (ibid).

Javier Urcid (nd) believes that the corpus of eighty known signs from the Nuiñe writing system of the Mixteca Baja, has several affinities with Zapotec writing. Both scripts, he feels, are closely related. For example, day signs within the 260-day system show greater correspondence between Zapotec and Nuiñe than either system share with the later Mixtec script. Nuiñe also uses bar and dot numerals (Moser 1983:212), with doubled elongated bars, wrapped in one or more angled, vertical bands. Numeral coefficients accompany calendrical dates and personal names. As in Zapotec writing, solar year signs used include the Monte Alban I-II headband form as well as the A and O form used by the Postclassic Mixtecs (ibid). Year signs include Flower, Turquoise, and Flint (or Stone). Both Nuiñe and Zapotec eventually diverged into distinctive regional scripts. Christopher Moser (1983:213) notes that in Monte Alban I and II numeral dots were placed above bars (signifying the number five), a trait adapted and maintained by the Nuiñe. This was reversed at Monte Alban by Period IIIa, with dots placed below bars (ibid). Hieroglyphs in the Nuiñe system include cartouches, speech scrolls, and day signs. Cartouches frequently contain affixes (ibid).

Nuiñe's occupation falls within dates set for the Epiclassic (Paddock 1983:208). Eric Thompson noted a certain similarity between circular cartouches found in Nuiñe contexts and the round cartouche-enclosed hieroglyphs at Cotzumalhuapa (Paddock 1983:209). Jeffrey Wilkerson equates relief carvings from Tajin ballcourts with Nuiñe traits on stones from Huajuapan (Paddock 1983:211). Some scholars see a widespread horizon for round cartouche-enclosed day signs.

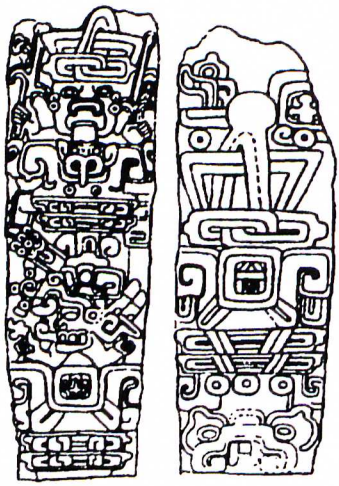


Figure 7.14 Example of Ñuiñe script.

In Oaxacan writing systems, glyphs are placed in columns and oriented in a left-facing direction. Later Mixtec writing developed using many of the conventions established by the Zapotec. Mixtec is known primarily from Postclassic context. While sign symbols inherit conventions established earlier in Oaxaca, the use and placement of these signs by the Mixtec conforms more to graphic traditions at Teotihuacan and the later Postclassic civilizations in and around Central Mexico. Glyphs supplement dominant image in pictorial narrative, essentially "read" through Mixteca-Puebla iconographic representation. Mixtec, like the later Aztec system, essentially uses an all dot system, rather than a combination of bar and dots (Marcus 1992:96). Mixtec appears to be an amalgamation of Zapotec and Teotihuacan writing, incorporating traits that additionally tell us as much about the time period (Postclassic) as the geographic location (Oaxaca).

Central Mexico

Janet Berlo writes that "one unbroken, though regionally variable, writing tradition existed in Central Mexico, with its roots in Middle Horizon Teotihuacan and its ultimate flowering in Late Horizon Aztec writing (Berlo 1989:19). I assert to the contrary that after the fall of Teotihuacan, Central Mexico experiences a radical shift in the nature, form, and function of hieroglyphic writing. This new form exhibits traits from Zapotec writing; so just as we see a transformation in Oaxaca towards Teotihuacan-like conventions, we see the opposite tendency in Central Mexico. I agree with Berlo that to some extent "Central Mexican writing had its genesis at Teotihuacan" (1989:44), but I do not agree with her premise that writing at Cacaxtla and Xochicalco represent rungs on an evolutionary ladder reaching its zenith in Aztec writing at the time of the Conquest.

Late Classic Central Mexican hieroglyphic writing has been the topic of studies by Berlo (1989), Hirth (1989), Urcid (nd), Justeson (nd), and Marcus (2001). Munro Edmunson (1992:158) refers to this as Tilantongo-Nahua script.

The nature of writing at Xochicalco, Cacaxtla, and Teotenango is a substantial departure from writing at both Teotihuacan, and what we later see accompanying Aztec relief carvings and folding screen books. We can measure these differences through the use of diagnostic traits.

Javier Urcid (unpublished ms) established day sign comparisons between Zapotec, Mixtec, Nuiñe, and Xochicalco. Urcid (1996) believes that writing at Xochicalco, like Nuiñe, derives to a large extent from Zapotec. John Justeson (personal communication) also sees a Zapotec derivation for this script based on several shared signs and conventions between Zapotec and Xochicalco inscriptions.

Bar and dot numerals accompany calendric signs or day names at Xochicalco, Cacaxtla, Texmilincan, and Teotenango. Like Zapotec and Nuiñe scripts, bars are often oblong or doubled; wrapped with angled vertical bands. Accompanying dots at all three sites are frequently donut-shaped, another convention that can be seen both in Zapotec and Nuiñe inscriptions. Yet Teotenango, Xochicalco, and Cacaxtla also used more than one system of enumeration.

> "The flexible use of two counting methods, the dot system and the bar and dot system, is another shared feature...the Teotenango stela exhibits a variable convention for binding the 5-bars: either slanted trapezoidal bindings or dounutlike rings on the horizontal bars. This occurs at both Xochicalco and Cacaxtla" (Berlo 1989:42).

Carved monumental inscriptions found on stelae from Xochicalco and Teotenango convey glyphic columns (Caso: 161-162; Berlo 1989: 40-42). The extent to which glyphic columns were used at the associated site of Texmilincan is not known. Cacaxtla's glyphs serve as captions, subordinate to image. However a cursory inventory of shared signs suggest that its writing system is related to Xochicalco, a point corroborated by Javier Urcid (personal communication). Therefore, both exhibit traits of the antecedent Zapotec script. Debra Nagao (1989:93) writes that "of the Oaxacan-derived traits in the monumental arts at Cacaxtla, similarities are entirely glyphic."

We see the A and O (or trapeze and ray) year sign on Xochicalco stelae, and forming headdresses on seated relief-carved figures on the Temple of the Feathered Serpent from that site (Nagao 1989: 94-95). We also find the year sign at Cacaxtla (Berlo 1989:41-42), on the Teotenango Stela (Berlo:40-41; Romero Quiroz 1963), and on a carved monument now in Rome's L. Pigorini Museum.

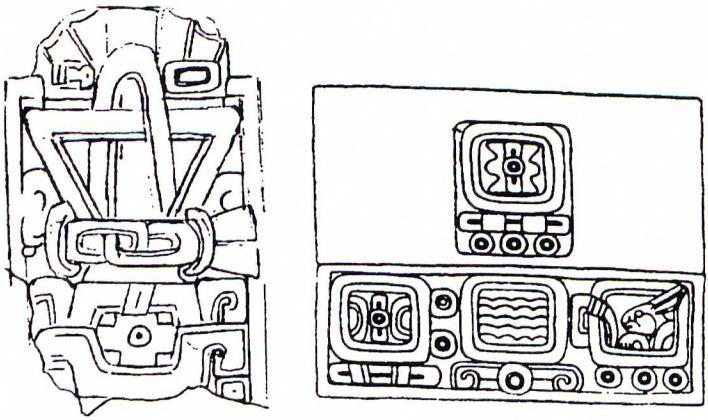


Figure 7.15a and 7.15b. Examples of Xochicalco writing.

Shared features of Xochicalco writing include a blood compound (Berlo 1989), loops, tabs, or ropes hooking day sign cartouches, human hands and feet that appear to modify the meaning of the hieroglyph, as well as arrows pointing in one direction or another. Xochicalco toponyms are rendered with a stylized hill or platform, in a convention first used by the Zapotecs that was also used in Nuine writing (Moser 1977).

While evidence suggests that the Xochicalco-related glyphic system is in part derived from Zapotec hieroglyphic script, this does not explain dominant displays of Maya iconographic representation found at both Xochicalco and Cacaxtla. How does one account for rulers depicted on the Temple of the Feathered Serpent that so strongly resemble the Classic Maya lords carved on the surface of Copan Altar Q? Or the similarity in subject matter and style between the Classic Maya murals at Bonampak in southern Chiapas and the murals at Cacaxtla in the modern Mexican state of Tlaxcala in Central Mexico? In the Late 8th Century hieroglyphs in Central Mexico and the Maya

region seem to have little or no connection, apart from a new impetus on the part of the people of Xochicalco to produce sequentially arranged hieroglyphic texts. Yet, such texts look nothing whatsoever like Maya hieroglyphic inscriptions.

Archaeologists unearthed an isolated example of Maya hieroglyphic writing at Xochitecatl, a Postclassic site separated from Cacaxtla by less than a kilometer. Walking between the "sites" it becomes immediately evident that Cacaxtla and Xochitecatl represent one site with multiple occupational levels. The Maya hieroglyphs are incised on to the flattened round-rimmed blackware vase now on display at the Tlaxcala Museum. To heighten the mystery, the vessel type has no counterparts in either Central Mexico or the Maya area, but rather represents an unusual style of vase found in Late Classic Oaxaca (naturally, without the Maya glyphs).

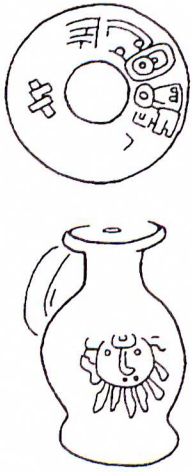


Figure 7.16 Maya hieroglyphs on a vessel from Xochitecatl/Cacaxtla. Drawing by Cherra Wyllie.

There are no Long Count dates found in Central Mexico or Oaxaca before, during, or after the Epiclassic period. Writing systems in both Central Mexico and Oaxaca use Year Bearers and Year Signs related to the Fifty-Two year (solar) calendar.

Little attention has been focused on the sign system at Tula, which for the most part was confined to name glyphs (Berlo 1989:44[Maudslay 1989-1902; Tozzer 1957]). Generally considered to be an Early Postclassic site, dating at Tula, Hidalgo is problematic, and it is uncertain whether its hieroglyphs are from Epiclassic or Postclassic contexts. Mexican archaeologists Oswaldo Sterpone and Juan Carlos Equihua Manrique have recently suggested that several structures at Tula Grande date to the Corral phase (ca. C.E. 800-950) (Koontz 2001), far earlier than dates generally associated with that site. Be that as it may, name glyphs at Tula appear to be consistent with writing as found at Teotihuacan and in later "Mixteca-Puebla" contexts.

The later Aztec notational system of Central Mexico was largely an all dot system, rather than using bars to denote five. As mentioned above, the Mixtecs also used a predominantly all dot system (Marcus 1992:95-96). Aztec writing offers a few notable exceptions. The first is a carved stone serpent's head, uncovered in Mexico City in 1944. On the rear of this sculpture is the date of 8 Reed. The square cartouche housing the day sign is rendered using Zapotec conventions, like those found at Xochicalco. Beneath the glyph is a doubled, oblong horizontal bar wrapped with two angled, vertical bands (Caso 1967:15-16). The Dedication Stone from the Templo Mayor at Tenochtitlan (Caso 1967:59-60; Pasztory 1983:150-151) also gives us an 8 Reed date, but in this instance the numeral coefficient is rendered using all dots. The monument incorporates Postclassic

Central Mexican or Aztec style, with image in this case being equally important as the accompanying date. Bar and dots are also found on the reverse sides of both the Cospi and Fejervary-Mayer codices. Caso (1976:15) refers to this use of bars in this context as *"el antiguo sistema de representar el 5"*.

Writing in Veracruz and the Gulf Coast

Before continuing on to an analysis of the above hieroglyphic data, a few things must be mentioned regarding writing in Veracruz—the central thesis of this dissertation and the subject of an historic overview contained in the following chapter. Given the in-depth treatment to follow, this section will be brief, while providing sufficient information for slotting scripts in this region within their appropriate designations.

Janet Berlo (1989:42-43) mentions four sites in Classic-era Veracruz containing hieroglyphic texts: El Tajin, Maltrata, Piedra Labrada, and Cerro de Las Mesas. These sites reflect the diversity of writing on the Gulf Coast, as well as the change and eclecticism characterizing the end of the Classic Period.

Cerro de las Mesas continues the Isthmian tradition of constructing stelae with ruler portraits and columns of hieroglyphic texts. Texts appear in single, vertical columns. Long Count dates reinforce the historic nature of these inscriptions. While the script and associated imagery have been compared with Early Classic Maya and Izapan sculpture (Berlo 1989:43; Stirling 1943), the La Mojarra stela (C.E. 36) provides the clear prototype. Southern Veracruz artists produced such stelae from the onset of the Common era until on or about the 7th Century (Miller 1991). Then, as in other areas of ancient Mesoamerica, the form and function of art and writing undergoes substantial change.

Figure 7.17 Cerro de las Mesas ST 6

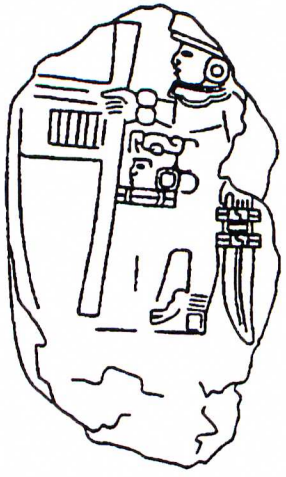


Figure 7.18 Cerro de las Mesas ST 11

One significant change occurs with the introduction of individual scenes labeled with one or more calendric signs. Cerro de las Mesas has three of these monuments, all containing square cartouche day signs (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 9). Stirling (1943), Berlo (1989), and Taube (1999) suggest that these are Teotihuacan or Central Mexican glyphs. While there are elements of Central Mexican iconography on these carvings, the square cartouche hieroglyphs are recognizably different from Teotihuacan-derived signs.

The square cartouche day signs are ubiquitous throughout Veracruz during the last phases of the Classic period. They accompany narrative scenes on fine paste molded-carved bowls found in the Mixtequilla, Tuxtlas, and as far north as El Tajin. We also see them carved on the Central Column from the Mound of the Building Columns at El Tajin.

These signs consist of a square cartouche-enclosed sign from the 260-day sacred calenda topped with bar and dot numerals.

El Tajin provided a second nominative form—main signs placed above bar and dot numerals, but without cartouche enclosures. Among these is the famed 13 Rabbit glyph, naming a key protagonist in narrative scenes from the Mound of the Building Columns. 13 Rabbit's name also appears on Rio Blanco pottery of the Fine Relief Blackware variety.

The Maltrata Monument is a boulder carved with two scenes on either side of the monolith accompanied by cartouche-enclosed hieroglyphs with bar and dot numerals. A temple on one side of the sculpture recalls the style of El Tajin architecture (Berlo 1989:42)—talud-tablero construction with the exotic addition of flaring cornices and recessed niches placed at regular intervals. As with the Cerro de las Mesas sculpture, it can be misleading to analyze the script solely on the basis of associated style and image. Day signs at Maltrata are fundamentally different from either of the forms present at Tajin. Here, cartouche-enclosed hieroglyphs rest above bar and dot numerals, with loops or tabs (mistakenly drawn as rabbits by Mendellin Zenil!) hooking the cartouche of three out of four of these hieroglyphs. Both the structure and content of the day signs connect them with hieroglyphs in the Xochicalco system (ibid; Urcid: personal communication). On closer examination, the iconographic program reinforces their Xochicalco association. As on the Pyramid of the Feathered Serpent at Xochicalco, a seated figure portrayed on the Maltrata Monolith is shown wearing the trapeze and ray headdress or crown of rulership. The presence of a Feathered Serpent and Venus star pendant links the image to Cacaxtla in its both content and style (Baird 1989:119). Medellin Zenil assigned an

Epiclassic date to the Maltrata monument based on associated pottery fragments and the Tajin-style structure depicted on the stone (Berlo 1989:42 [Medellin Zenil 1962:559-561]).

Piedra Labrada, not far from the Teotihuacan outpost of Matacapan in southern Veracruz, offers a monumental stela with a column of vertically-arranged hieroglyphs. Like the Maltrata Monolith, Piedra Labrada Stela 1 contains glyphs recognizable from Xochicalco context (Berlo 1989:43). As at Xochicalco, Piedra Labrada offers us a sequence of glyphic information, rather than "floating glyphs" so prevalent during much of the Epiclassic period.

Figure 7.19 Maltrata monument.

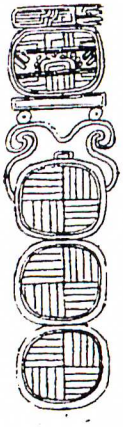


Figure 7.20 Piedra Labrada. Wyllie.

As discussed more fully in the next two chapters, three forms of hieroglyphic writing coexist in Veracruz during the Late Classic period. This coexistence mirrors the eclectic nature of image and text in other Mesoamerican regions—most notably Chichen Itza, where we also have Xochicalco-related hieroglyphs in addition to both Classic Maya

and regionally-modified Maya forms, as well as a few hieroglyphs from Late Classic Veracruz.

During the Postclassic phase writing in Veracruz (as in all but the most conservative regions of the Maya) assumes traits linking it with Aztec or Mixteca-Puebla conventions. The Huastecs in northern Veracruz and the Totonacs in the south both adopt all dot numeral coefficients, calendric signs, and toponyms, while using a non-language specific visual vocabulary. These conventions—with all but a few variations in the iconography of Central Mexico, Oaxaca, and Veracruz—correspond to some degree with delineations of the later Aztec Empire and interaction sphere. Viewing texts on sculpture from Zempoala and Castillo de Teayo, or as found on the Tuxpan Lienzo, geographic origins for these objects cannot be ascertained on the basis of style, script, or iconography. While during the Late Classic-Early Postclassic transition the number and diversity of scripts and styles makes the assignation of origins and trajectories challenging, during the Postclassic the widespread uniformity of image and text makes it nearly impossible.

Therefore, in Veracruz as elsewhere in Mesoamerica, the years C.E. 700-1000 offer us a complex but discrete window into the proliferation and cross-pollenization of writing and visual symbolism. Key questions include: 1) How to distinguish broadly disseminated temporal forms, 2) How to isolate and diagnose discrete writing systems, one from another, and 3) How to track the changes in these systems through time.

Establishing the Presence of Distinct Systems and Their Trajectories

Using the diagnostic properties set forth in the chapter (1. Day signs, 2. Solar Year-bearer signs and associated year-bearer sets, 3. properties and structure of numeration, 4. aspects of phoneticism where known, 5. linguistic structure when known, 6. use or absence of Long Count dates, 7. Calendar Round dates, 8. iconographic properties, 9. length of texts, as well as sequence and structure of the signs employed where known, 10. reading order and directionality, 11. use of toponyms, and 12. style of nominative forms) I present a comparative list of Mesoamerican scripts contained in Appendix VII. 1. A visual display of this quantitative information appears in Table 7.1 below.

DIAGNOSTIC ATTRIBUTES OF MESOAMERICAN WRITING SYSTEMS											
		Calendar						Nature of Text			
		Day Signs Cartouches	Number Placement*	Bars	Loops / Tabs	Year Bearers	Long Count	Text Dominated	Reading Order	Evidence of Phoneticism	Toponym Style
Region I Gulf Coast											
	Epi Olmec	Square	Above	Plain	No	Yes (?)	Yes	Yes	1 Column, T to B	Yes	Anthropo-morphic
	El Tajin	None	Below	Plain	No	No	No	No	Pictures	No	Step-frets
	Rio Blanco	Square	Above	Plain	No	No	No	No	Pictures	No	?
	Maltrata	Rounded Square	Below	Wrapped	Yes	No	No	No	n/a	No	None
	Piedra Labrada	Rounded Square	Below	Wrapped	Yes	No	No	Yes	T to B	No	None
Region II Oaxaca											
	Zapotec	Rounded Square	Below	Wrapped	No	Yes	No	50/50	Varies	Some	Step-frets
	Nuine	Rounded Square	Below	Wrapped	No	Yes	No	50/50	T to B	?	Step-frets
	Mixtec	None	Left	No bars	No	Yes	No	No	Pictures	No	Hill Sign
Region III Maya											
	Classic Maya	Round w. Pedestal	Left	Plain	No	Different System	Yes	Yes	Double Columns	Yes	Emblem Glyphs
	Chichen Itza	Varied	Left	Plain	No	Unknown	No	50/50	Varies	Yes	Emblem Glyphs
	Terminal Classic (Pasion area)	Square	Varies	Plain	No	No	No	Yes	Double Columns	?	Emblem Glyphs
	Cotzumalhuapa	Round	Varies	No bars	No	No	No	No	n/a	No	None
	Pacific Coast	Square	Above	Plain	No	?	Yes	Yes	T to B	?	Anthropo-morphic
Region IV Central Mexico											
	Teotihuacan	Rounded Square	Below	Wrapped	No	Unknown	No	No	n/a	?	Hill Sign
	Xochicalco	Rounded Square	Below	Wrapped	Yes	Yes	No	50/50	T to B	Unknown	Step-frets
	Cacaxtla	Rounded Square	Below	Wrapped	Yes	Yes	No	No	n/a	Unknown	None
	Aztec	None	Left	No bars	No	Yes	No	No	Pictures	Some	Hill Sign

By examining these data, certain patterns emerge:

1. Four distinct hieroglyphic scripts (Mixe-Zoquean, Zapotec, Mayan, and Teotihuacan) originate and develop in ancient Mesoamerica during the Late Formative-Early Classic period. Each form was likely influenced to a greater or lesser degree by precursors of writing by the Olmec. Mayan hieroglyphic writing received its impetus from Mixe-Zoquean (Urcid 1992: 3-4; Coe 1996) (also known as Epi-Olmec or Isthmian). Mayan and Mixe-Zoquean scripts adopted Zapotec conventions for Calendar Round dates. As Michael Coe rightly points out, there was probably cross-fertilization in early scripts; writing developing synchronically (Coe and Kerr 1998).
2. Each of four major systems spawned a number of scripts—yet this influence did not create a taxonomic structure in the strictest sense, since each "satellite" script was, in turn, open to stimulus from *other* extant graphic systems.
3. Zapotec hieroglyphic writing provided an impetus for scripts in the Southwestern and Central Highlands of Mesoamerica including Teotihuacan, Nuine, Xochicalco, Teotenango, Chalco, Cacaxtla, and Toltec writing (Urcid Serrano 1992). Diagnostic features of these scripts include wrapped bars and donut-style dots, loops or chords hooking through semi-rectangular cartouche borders, disembodied feet and hands integrated in both narrative image and text, Year bearer signs, semi-rectangular day sign cartouche enclosures resting above bar and dot numerals, CR dates, a blocky artistic style, and a capacity for sequential ideas through a series of successive hieroglyphs. By these criteria we see that hieroglyphic writing from the Veracruz archaeological sites of Piedra Labrada

and Maltrata also falls under this broad family of scripts. Iconography also links Maltrata and Piedra Labrada with Xochicalco and Cacaxtla in the Central Highlands. Other Xochicalco style hieroglyphs appear at Chichen Itza during the Terminal Classic period.

4. Maya hieroglyphic writing influenced regional variations of its script at Chichen Itza (John Harris—photocopied handout), and possibly in the western Peten (c. C.E. 830-1000). Diagnostic features of Maya logo-phonetic script include use of Long Count dates (discontinued after the ninth century), Calendar Round dates, paired hieroglyphic columns read left to right and top to bottom in nearly all cases, affixes, cartouche day signs, encoded speech, numerical classifiers consisting of unadorned and rectangular bars signifying five and circles symbolizing ones (head and full body numeral variants notwithstanding). The corpus of Classic Maya inscriptions is immense; the script nearly fully deciphered. Therefore, recognizing the fluid, curvilinear properties of perhaps the only ancient American script known beyond the inner sanctum of academe is not particularly difficult. This having been said, recognizing the progeny or regional variations of Maya writing is less straightforward.

The Maya Highlands and Pacific Coast produced several (possibly related) scripts, bearing no discernable relationship to Maya hieroglyphic writing. The earliest of these include texts at El Baul, Kaminaljuyu, and Abaj Takalik rendered in pure Izapan style. Glyphic conventions and iconography connect these early Pacific and Highland inscriptions with Isthmian writing from Veracruz, Tabasco, and northeastern Chiapas, yet we also detect precursors to Maya script in both format and

cosmological symbolism. A detectable Gulf Coast connection persists in later scripts from the Guatamala Pacific coast including hieroglyphs found on Classic period Tiquisate wares from Escuintla (Hellmuth 1975, 1987), and mysterious stone stelae from Cotzumalhuapa. The perfectly round calendric signs at Cotzumalhuapa share little resemblance to either Maya or Mixe- Zoquean hieroglyphs. Tiquisate tripods *do* contain a few round hieroglyphs, however. Writing in this region displays a certain underlying continuity, suggesting homegrown developments as much as outside influence.

5. Although Zapotec script undoubtedly influenced Teotihuacan's glyphic forms, Teotihuacan never developed graphic properties readily identifiable as writing. Few signs have the obvious appearance of hieroglyphs. Complex figure-ground relationships hinder the viewer from flushing out meaningfully-encoded symbols from what might otherwise be decorative icons or even totemic symbols. These signs splash against the palace walls like playful wallpaper patterns. In most cases neither text nor image offers us obvious sequential order. Art lacks complex narrative. As with the Hierankompolis murals mentioned in Chapter 2, our eye is left to wander.

Hieroglyphs on Teotihuacan ceramics *look* like hieroglyphs. Yet it could be argued that these were produced for export. Can we be entirely sure that such symbols encode Teotihuacan symbolism?

Status laden Teotihuacan iconography, on the other hand, appears everywhere. Not only at Tikal and Kaminaljuyu during the Early Classic period, when Teotihuacan is at its height, but after the fall we continue to see a plethora of

Teotihuacan "renaissance" symbolism at Xochicalco, Maltrata, Cerro de las Mesas, Teotenango, and elsewhere integrated into a conscious "internationalism". As centers throughout Mesoamerica jockey for position, each proclaiming itself the next economic and political hub, picture supplants hieroglyphic text as the communication medium of choice. The difference is that pictorial programs develop discernable narrative sequence. Teotihuacan leaves its indelible mark in the pictorial programs of El Tajin, Xochicalco, and Tula, Hidalgo.

At El Tajin, hieroglyphs with bar and dot numerals serve as naming devices identifying key players in the narrative. Although we presume these names derive from the 260-day sacred calendar, they lack the cartouche enclosures of comparable glyphs in Central Mexico, Oaxaca, Veracruz, and the Maya lowlands. Toponyms at Tajin (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 10) incorporate temple platforms and trees—the latter apparently influenced by the totemic or toponymic "flowering trees" at Teotihuacan.

In all likelihood the Zapotec painted tombs offered another key influence in the narrative pictography that emerged in carved panels of El Tajin's ballcourt and monumental architecture. Again we see synchronic development. These conventions and symbols eventually segue into the rich pictorial histories of Mixtec and Aztec. We readily recognize earlier influences in the development of nominative forms and toponymic conventions that become part of the established canons of Mixteca-Puebla style.

6. We distinguish Epi-Olmec writing by its linear, incised style. Reading order for each column of hieroglyphic text is top to bottom, regardless of how many

columns appear in any given inscription. Isthmian or Epi-Olmec writing, like Maya writing, documents historic events through the combined use of Long Count and Calendar Round dates. As with Maya writing, bars consist of narrow, unadorned rectangles and dots are rendered rather simply. The system is logosyllabic (Coe and Kerr 1998; Justeson and Kaufman 2001; Justeson 1986; Meluzin 1995), encoding language of Mixe Zoquean speakers. Main signs possess affixes, appendages that modify the sound or meaning of the host symbol. Epi-Olmec writing shares several key features with Isthmian writing from the Maya Highlands and Pacific Coast as mentioned above.

Epi-Olmec writing continues in Veracruz at Cerro de las Mesas during the Classic Period. Toward the end of the Classic Period zoomorphic platforms and square cartouche day signs topped with bar and dot numerals continue to identify southern Veracruz-origin writing even after the practice of erecting dynastic histories in carved stone discontinues.

Tracing the developmental trajectories of ancient Mesoamerican scripts creates a dizzying cats-cradle of interlocking patterns. Still, it is possible to pick out key threads. In our next several chapters we follow one such trail--leading us from the southern Veracruz heartland in a number of unexpected directions.

Chapter Eight
Writing in Ancient Veracruz

The symbolic system of the Olmec incubated in the lush corridors of the Veracruz-Tabasco coastal plain and eventually spread into the adjacent territories of Oaxaca and the Maya lowlands. Where true logo-syllabic writing germinated *per se* may never be precisely known. Yet at the dawn of the Common Era and in the centuries thereafter writing existed in several areas of southern Mesoamerica, including Abaj Takalik and Kaminaljuyu, and among the Zapotecs, lowland Maya, and the people of the Gulf Coast (Coe 1998:70). The latter was known as *Isthmian* script or La Mojarra writing (after La Mojarra Stela 1).

The Middle Formative Period Olmec provide possible evidence of writing and phoneticism. La Venta Monument 19 offers epigraphic reinforcement to Feathered Serpent iconography. The protagonist on this monument is transported through space-time within a cartouche-like enclosure. Two quetzal birds flank a central sky motif represented by crossed bands. Using the rebus principle, the artist ingeniously draws on homophones for "snake" and "sky." Thus at the threshold of writing we are given paired concepts that can be "read" as "quetzal coatl" or "quetzal serpent"(Coe 1973; Taube 1996).

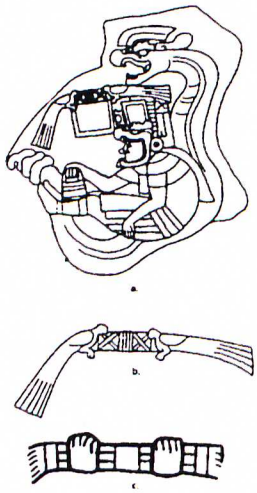


Figure 8.1 La Venta Monument 19 showing possible phonetic signs, from Taube [Coe].

Another La Venta carving, Monument 13 (c. 600 BCE) shows a right-facing figure in profile carrying a flag or banner—a common theme in later Classic Veracruz art. To his right is a glyphic column. The final sign in the sequence is a bird's head. A lone footprint is planted in the space behind the figure (Harris and Stearns 1997). The glyphic column suggests a sequence of ideas possibly augmented with sound values. The isolated footprint may denote action, thus functioning as a verb in its relation to the adjacent image. We find common pairings in the semasiographic writing or pictography of Aztec and Mixtec, with information predominantly conveyed through representation (Boone 2000). Yet these later systems generally lack sequential hieroglyphs, and while incorporating elements of phoneticism, the objective of such conveyance was "to form a composite system that could function across linguistic boundaries" (Boone 2000:32). There is no evidence that the Olmec created monuments with sequenced glyphs outside

of the Veracruz-Tabasco heartland. The relationship between La Venta Monument 13 and early examples of Zapotec script is unclear, if indeed any relationship existed. We might therefore presume that the Olmec themselves were the intended audience for stelae such as those at La Venta—in other words, if linguists are correct in their assumptions, Mixe-Zoquean speakers (Coe 1994).

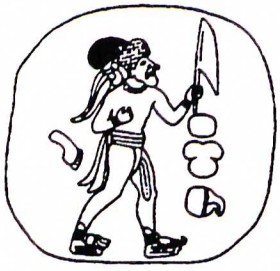


Figure 8.2 La Venta Monument 13

Epi-Olmec hieroglyphic texts also encode Mixe-Zoquean language. Therefore, we can reasonably conclude that La Venta Monuments 19 and 13 are precursors to the fully developed script found on La Mojarra Stela 1 approximately six hundred years later. This suggests an underlying cultural continuity not immediately evident through iconographic conventions alone. Since the Middle Formative, Olmec possessed a distinctive diagnostic style—indeed a temporal marker—stylistic evidence alone would imply that the culture and its people simply vanished from the ethnic matrix of ancient Veracruz. Such an assumption belies delineations of the prevailing scholarship, while not reflecting the archaeological evidence.

We find the earliest example of what scholars call Isthmian or Epi-Olmec writing on Stela 2 from Chiapa de Corzo, Chiapas; it is also the earliest known example of a Mesoamerican Long Count date (8 December, 36 B.C.E.), but lacks the Calendar Round

dates used by the Zapotecs. Thus the linear count of days from a fixed point in time (or 3114 B.C.E.) was an Isthmian or Gulf Coast invention. Although the Long Count later came to be associated with the Maya, the earliest Isthmian examples predate the appearance of Long Count dates in Maya contexts by over a hundred years. Moreover, as we saw in the last chapter, peoples of southern Veracruz continued erecting monuments with Long Count dates until well into the Seventh Century C.E.

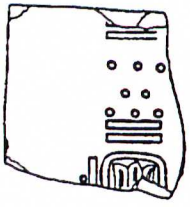


Figure 8.3 Chiapa de Corzo sherd showing the earliest example of a Long Count date.

The presence of the Calendar Round and absence of Long Count by the ancient Zapotec, and conversely the presence of this linear count by peoples of the Gulf Coast, suggest two distinctly different ways of thinking about time; alternate paradigms, later intermeshed by the people of southeastern Mesoamerica who amalgamated them into a gear-like temporal super structure. This lack or presence of Long Count dates divides the scripts of Central Mexico and Oaxaca from those in southeast Mesoamerica until the end of the Classic period.

The mythical origins of time as a continuum commenced on August 13, 3114 B.C.E. (Harris and Stearns 1997:16). In all likelihood this date held a symbolic reference for the creators of the time count; perhaps the genesis of a new world, the origins of a powerful lineage, or the birth of the gods. Whatever the reference—whether religious or political in its inception—this beginning became *the* beginning in other parts of

Mesoamerica. The adoption of this concept by the Maya and others is significant, for in doing so they were accepting the Isthmian cosmological basis for the operation of space-time. Therefore, we should not find it surprising that the people of the Gulf Coast shared other religious concepts with the Maya and their predecessors.

The Long Count way of reckoning time was contained geographically to the southeastern portions of Mesoamerica. We find it among the lowland Maya and the inhabitants of Abaj Takalik and Kaminaljuyu, as well as by the Isthmian artist-scribes. This same area, according to Michael Coe (1988:23; 1999:63), was the birthplace of an artistic style. During the Late Preclassic, following the collapse of Olmec civilization, a transformation took place in both southern Veracruz and Izapan sites of the piedmont and Pacific coast of Guatemala and Chiapas. We begin to see suggestions of the complex interlace design that in its later fluorescence characterized Classic Veracruz style, first defined by Tatiana Proskouriakoff in 1954. These stylistic affinities and ways of marking time were rooted in a shared mythology that the Quiche Maya of the Guatemala highlands would later call *The Popol Vuh* (Coe 1988:23). Elements of this creation story can be seen on the monumental sculpture of Izapa and Kaminaljuyu, as well as on Stela D at Tres Zapotes and on a carved stela from El Meson in southern Veracruz (Coe 1988:23-24 [Covarrubias 1957, fig.68]). Wuqub' Kaqix or the Principal Bird Deity is prominently featured in the iconography of both regions (ibid). Clearly, Veracruz was linked culturally with the Maya highland and lowland regions throughout much of its history (Coe 1988:23).

Figure 8.4 Izapa ST 2 with imagery associated with the later *Popol Vuh*.

The people of Preclassic Izapa spoke Tapachulteco, a Mixe-Zoquean language (Coe 1999). The site of Izapa itself is located in the modern Mexican state of Chiapas, not far from the Guatemalan Pacific. The associated Izapan art style extends eastward to the neighboring sites of Abaj Takalik, El Baul, and Kaminaljuyu.

Abaj Takalik shows evidence of an earlier Olmec presence, while later phase Stela 2 from that same site offers Cycle 7 dates followed by columnar hieroglyphic text. Stela 1 from El Baul also contains a Baktun 7 inscription, but with glyphs organized into paired columns. This structure is diagnostic of later Maya writing. Unlike Mayan inscriptions El Baul Stela 1 begins with a non-Maya day sign, topped with bar-and-dot numerals. Michael Coe (1999:64-65) reads this as the Mexican equivalent of 12 Eb. The Long Count date following the day sign (reconstructed as 7.19.15.7.12) corresponds to 12 Eb and therefore reinforces this reading. Structurally, La Mojarra Stela 1 also contains day signs larger in scale than other hieroglyphs within the accompanying text. Like the day sign on El Baul Stela 1, day signs on the La Mojarra Stela are semi-rectangular. El Baul Stela 1 dates to C.E. 36 (ibid), while the Epi-Olmec La Mojarra stela is well over a hundred years later (C.E. 157). Yet, the El Baul monument postdates both Chiapa de Corzo Stela 2 (36 B.C.E.) and Tres Zapotes Stela C (32 B.C.E.). Kaufman and Justeson

(2001:2) also believe that an Epi-Olmec text found on pottery from Chiapa de Corzo can be dated to around 300 B.C.E. on the basis of archaeological contexts. Whatever the precise trajectory, time-depth for Mixe-Zoquean related writing is substantial.

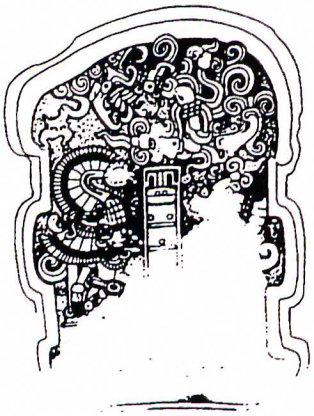


Figure 8.5a Abaj Takalik ST 2

Figure 8.5b El Baul ST 1

Teasing out the properties of what constitutes "Epi-Olmec," "Izapan," and "Proto-Mayan" writing at these prodigious dates presents extraordinary challenges. What seems clear is that within Izapan stelae we see the impetus for later Maya hieroglyphic text. Izapan stelae also provide epigraphic evidence for sustained contact between the former Olmec heartland and the Pacific piedmont region during the Late Formative Period. The linguistic connections between the two areas certainly support the premise of a shared cultural base. The exact nature of this relationship is a critical question, since these early texts form the underpinnings for the hieroglyphic system or systems found in both regions at the end of the Classic period.

Examining this possible Izapa-Veracruz connection, the Miraflores stela from Kaminaljuyu offers us another set of inscriptions, neither recognizably "Mayan" nor "Epi-Olmec." Kaufman and Justeson (Kaufman and Justeson 2001) write—

> "The Kaminaljuyu script has some signs known from both Mayan and epi-Olmec writing, others from the Mayan but not from epi-Olmec, and still others from epi-Olmec but not from Mayan. We suppose that the script represented Mije-Sokean or Mayan language—possible both."

The broken stela features masked gods, one wielding an eccentric flint, in the upper portion of the panel, and a profiled figure wearing a ballgame yoke framing four columns of hieroglyphic texts located below his arms and to the left of his body. The two large-scale day signs on the relief carving, each topped with bar and dot numerals, resemble those found on monuments such as La Mojarra Stela 1, while conveying a script that according to several scholars foreshadows Classic Maya hieroglyphic writing (Coe 1999). The day signs on this stela contain an ornate subfix of three scroll-like droplets. Veracruz day sign cartouches lack these decorative affixes. Classic Maya day sign cartouches, on the other hand, frequently rest on a pedestal of three scroll-like elements—perhaps an outgrowth of earlier traditions at Kaminaljuyu.

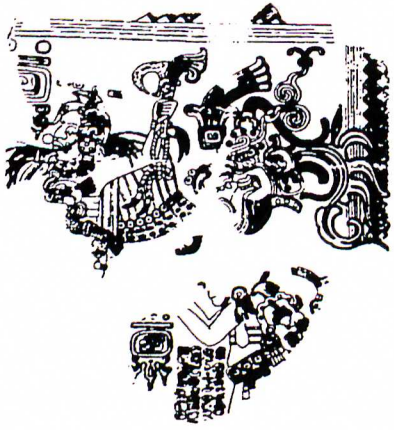


Figure 8.6 Kaminaljuyu Stela 10

Day signs on Escuintla-Tiquisate pottery contain flame-like scrolls jutting out from the upper surface of the cartouche enclosure. Although apparently contemporaneous with Classic Maya day signs, both the content of the main signs and the form of the enclosure are decidedly non-Maya. Tiquisate calendric scrolls share a stylistic similarity with the wavy subfixes descending from the Kaminaljuyu day signs.

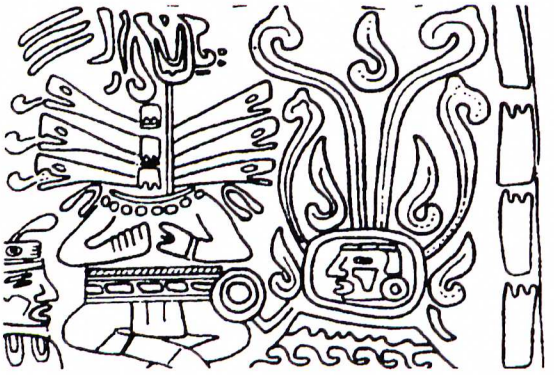


Figure 8.7 Scene from an Escuintla vessel, from Hellmuth.

The Classic period site of Tiquisate is situated centrally within the earlier geographic range of Izapan Style (Coe 1999:56). During the Terminal Classic period this region was later home to the Cotzumalhuapa style. All three styles-- Preclassic Izapan, Classic Period Tiquisate, and Terminal Classic Cotzumalhuapan –have strong affinities with "Classic Veracruz" in their choice of subjects, iconographic programs, and decorative conventions. This suggests that Mixe-Zoquean speakers shared an ideology, aesthetics, and visual semiotic system in two discrete geographic areas—on the Pacific and Gulf Coasts respectively. I think it is likely that the two regions remained in intermittent contact at least until the onset of the Postclassic. Yet one cultural area was not a cookie cutter replica of the other area. And certainly there was always a cross-

polinization of influences throughout Mesoamerica. Suffice it to say that the Lowland Maya were perfectly situated to reap the benefits of these two Mixe-Zoquean cultures.

The coastal areas of the Veracruz Gulf and Guatemalan Pacific maintained long traditions of interlaces and scroll motifs, ballgame iconography, and a distinctive pantheon. Is cultural continuity in this case cognate with ethnic continuity? In other words, did these diagnostic traits evolve from vestiges of a Mixe-Zoquean cultural base, or do they reflect traditions related to precise populations? Possible answers to these questions lie in the decipherment of hieroglyphic texts.

Without a doubt, the most thorough and complex early Veracruz inscription is La Mojarra Stela 1 from the Tuxtlas region. Decipherment by Kaufman and Justeson (2001) reveals a script with all the expected properties of logo-syllabic writing including logograms, syllabograms, mixed spellings, and semantic determiners. The corpus of Epi-Olmec texts encodes Mixe-Zoquean grammatical structure, as well as Zoquean vocabulary (Kaufman and Justeson 2001:4). Preclassic Epi-Olmec texts include Chiapa de Corzo Stela 2 and Chiapa de Corzo sherd, Tres Zapotes Stela C (32 B.C.E.), the Tuxtla Statuette (162 C.E.), the O'Boyle mask, and the El Sitio celt (ibid).

Tres Zapotes Stela C and Chiapa de Corzo Stela 2

Both the location and content of Stela C attests to underlying traditions of hieroglyphs and iconography spanning from Olmec times to the onset of the Postclassic period in southern Veracruz. I discuss the seated ruler shown on the obverse of the monument in Chapter 13 (Iconography). For the time being, let us concentrate on the inscription, located on the opposite surface.

Stela C begins the first known ISIG (Harris and Stearns 1997[Stirling 1940]) along with the Patron of theYear, in this case represented by a Jaguar, a calendric hieroglyphic used in southern Veracruz for the better part of the First Millennium. A Long Count date follows, fixing the event to 7.16.6.16.18 (32 BCE) (Kaufman and Justeson 2001). The linear time count is completed with a day sign enclosed in a rectangular cartouche. Stela C has two columns of hieroglyphic text, but unlike their Maya hieroglyphs, we read these Epi-Olmec columns individually.

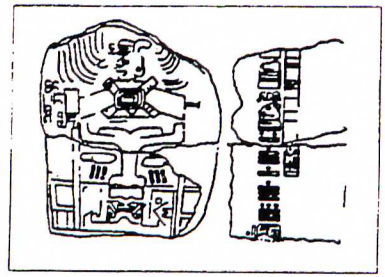


Figure 8.8 Tres Zapotes Stela C.

The layout of Stela C conforms to that of slightly earlier Chiapa de Corzo Stela 2, found in the Grijalva Depression of Chiapas, reconstructed as 7.16.3.2.13 (36 BCE) (Coe 1994; Coe and Kerr 1998). Stela 2 ends with the day sign Reed, enclosed in a square cartouche. In both inscriptions, Long Count dates are conveyed by stacked, horizontally oriented bar and dot numerals; their position within the sequence indicating their function as *Baktun, Katun, Tun, Winal, or K'in.* Suffice to say, these are Maya terms for their Epi-Olmec equivalents. Bar and dot numerals accompanying the day signs that follow the Long Count, are placed vertically, to the left of the cartouche.

The Tuxla Statuette

Justeson and Kauffman, Coe, and others link hieroglyphs on the Tuxtla Statuette with Isthmian or Epi-Olmec writing. Hieroglyphic texts are read in single columns from top to bottom. The inscription begins with a Long Count date (8.6.2.4.17), followed by a sign that appears in a square cartouche topped by a decorative affix. Situated to the left of the day sign are bar and dot numerals. They are oriented vertically in contrast to the horizontal orientation of the Long Count numerals in the place-holders above the day sign; three dots and a bar. Dots in a single column are on the left side of the vertically-placed five-bar. In the Long Count numerals preceding it, bars always sequentially follow dots. The sequence reinforces our notion of the reading order, with the glyphic configuration reading from top-to-bottom, and left-to-right, as in Maya hieroglyphic script. The date 8.6.2.4.17 falls on 8 Caban in the Maya 260-day calendar. The seventeenth day name Caban, meaning earth, is often connected with earthquake or movement in other Mesoamerican sacred calendars. We must assume this reading based on correlations, since the main identifiable component on the Tuxtla Statuette day sign is unreadable.

Bar and dot numerals connected with the Tuxtla Statuette day signs differ from sign structures in later Veracruz inscriptions. Here numbers are along side the day sign cartouche rather than resting above it. This suggests that placement of the numerals is somewhat flexible, as in Maya writing. Vertical numerals placed to the left of the cartouche also help distinguish it from the column of horizontally placed numerals above. In certain early examples of combined Long Count and Calendar Round dates, scribes used devices such as differential orientation or scale to draw a contrast between these two

time counts. In this way we might think of these differences as functioning like commas within our own way of recording the intermeshing of cyclical and linear time keeping.

Figure 8.9 Tuxtla Statuette

La Mojarra Stela 1

In Epi-Olmec texts the viewer reads "into the faces" of profiled figures in single vertical columns. These columns are read top-to-bottom. The reader approaches the sequence of columns (whether moving right or left) taking his or her cue from the orientation of glyphic profiles. So, while texts generally read top-to-bottom and left-to-right, they can conceivably be read top-to-bottom right-to-left. La Mojarra Stela 1 is unique in that it divides the text into two sections. This divide is in the central part of the inscription, so that the reader more or less balances his or her viewing of the text. Some ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic texts use a similar graphic device for aesthetic as well as functional purposes.

Epi-Olmec hieroglyphic stelae resemble Classic Maya stelae in several ways, and undoubtedly the former influenced the development of the latter. Both begin with dates in the Long Count and Calendar Round, followed in many cases by records of celestial or astronomical events. For the most part, Epi-Olmec inscriptions record the historic deeds of the ruling elite, whether in warfare or acts of piety, sanctioned by the divine forces of

gods and heavenly bodies. Associated images portray individual rulers or deities. These lone images are like iconographic stamps supporting the hieroglyphic narrative. Yet, if Kaufman and Justeson's decipherment is accurate (as I think it is), image and text function virtually independently of one another at this early date. The text we see in Late Formative Veracruz is language-specific. Only the image of a ruler or god speaks to a broader audience.

Figure 8.8 La Mojarra ST 1, drawing by George Stuart

La Mojarra Stela 1 is the longest inscription found anywhere and from any period in the Veracruz-Gulf Coast area. As on the Tuxtla Statuette we find hieroglyphic symbols in rectangular enclosures placed at the completion of Long Count dates within singular textual columns. The La Mojarra Stela contains two such dates: 13 Serpent and 5 Jaguar. Despite a confusing lack of spacing in the layout, the five-bar and serpent day sign just below it are not directly connected. As in the Tuxtla Statuette, numerals are placed vertically alongside the cartouche and read first. Consistent with these principles of

reading order and directionality, numerical coefficients are to the right of the right-facing Serpent and directly to the left of the left-facing Jaguar.

We find this sequence—first filing our eye past pots, then bars, then the day sign itself—not only in PreClassic Gulf Coast inscriptions, but also in Veracruz day signs on texts from Cerro de las Mesas, El Tajin, El Zapotal, and on portable Rio Blanco ceramics from the Mixtequilla (discussed in the next chapter). The day signs on the La Mojarra Stela are positioned at the completion of Long Count dates. The first reads 8.5.3.3.5., and is followed by a serpent within a square cartouche. The second, 8.5.16.9.7 is followed by the Jaguar day sign. As in the Tuxlta Statuette, the orientation of bar and dot numerals in the Long Count date helps to distinguish them from those in the Calendar Round. The first date 8.5.3.3.5 corresponds with the Maya C.R. date 13 Chichan, 3 Kayab; 8.5.16.9.7 falls on 5 Manik, 15 Poph.

The fifth Maya day sign, Chichan, is symbolized by a snake (Thompson 1971: 75 and 89). In the La Mojarra case, we arrive at a day sign with an image of a serpent and a coefficient of 13. In addition the day sign Serpent appears as a frequent day name and sign in the sacred calendar, and it has been suggested that snake is one of the non-Maya calendric signs from Jimbal in present day Guatemala (Taube 1999).

Figure 8.10 Serpent day sign from La Mojarra ST 1.

We also find the day sign Jaguar in many sacred 260-day calendars. It appears on Rio Blanco pottery and on Cerro de las Mesas Stela 15 (discussed below), both of which link the sign structurally and geographically to the Mixtequilla. Our second Long Count

date brings us to the equivalent of the Maya Tzolk'in date 5 Manik. Our day sign has a numeral coefficient of five, but Manik, the seventh Maya day sign shows a hand with a connected thumb and forefinger. Its position in the sequence of day signs connects it to Deer (*Mazat'l* in Nahuat'l) (Thompson 1971:76,77, and 89). Glyphic representations of deer heads are distinctive, both in Veracruz and elsewhere in ancient Mesoamerica, bearing no resemblance to the day sign at the end of column M. Therefore, we can imagine that the Epi-Olmec day sign in the seventh position was originally Jaguar.

8.11a 8.11b 8.11c

Figure 8.11 Jaguar day signs in southern Veracruz circa CE 100-1000, from La Mojarra ST 1 (8.11a), Cerro de las Mesas ST 15 (8.11b), and on Rio Blanco ceramics (8.11c).

Following the introducing glyph preceding the Long Counts on the La Mojarra Stela, hieroglyphs with numerical coefficients sit just above the Baktun dates in both instances. This is not part of the Long Count sequence (equivalent to the Maya *Pictun*, for example). Like the Serpent and the Jaguar below, the numerical coefficients are placed vertically alongside the hieroglyphs, drawing our eye towards them. Both of these signs rest on two bar-like platforms; the uppermost a plain, narrow, horizontally-placed rectangle; it rests atop another rectangular bar of identical dimensions, but the latter divided lengthwise into five even sections. Therefore, this symbolic device informs us that the two hieroglyphs share a similar function.

The first of these signs in column A contains what appears to be the flamed eyebrow of a harpy eagle perched above a square ahaw symbol shifted onto its side. While the composite meaning of these symbols is an enigma, the square Ahaw sign appears in the headdress of Veracruz lords as seen on Cerro de las Mesas Stela 5, Stela 8, and on the San Juan Chapultepec Stela. We see a comparable headdress configuration on Kaminaljuyu Stela 26. In Maya context, the iconic meaning of this symbol relates to lordship. Contextual placement of these signs in Veracruz iconography and text suggests a similar interpretation. The sign has a coefficient of 3. Our calculation of the following Long Count tells us that the date falls on the Maya CR 13 Chichan, 3 Kayab. The coefficient 3 lets us know that we are looking at the Haab or month day in the 365 day "vague year." Although numerically these calculations work out, neither the Maya patron of the month or the Maya month symbol Kayab appears related to the equivalent Epi-Olmec symbol in form or meaning.

This is also true of the 15 Serpent sign just before the start of the Long Count in column M. While the coefficient 15 matches our calculations, the Maya patron of the first month Poph is Jaguar, with the Maya hieroglyph for that month is associated with the mat of rulership (Thompson 1971: 107 and 118).

The Serpent is easily recognizable. Serpent is an Epi-Olmec day sign, therefore allowing us to see that at least in early Veracruz writing the same sign could represent either a day in the sacred calendar or a month in the vague year, depending on its position in the date sequence (in this case: introducing glyph-month-Long Count-day sign), as well as identifying properties such as presence or absence of a cartouche, or "double bar

platform." Serpent also appears on Rio Blanco ceramics as a numeral substitution above cartouche-enclosed day signs (discussed in the following chapter).

Cerro de las Mesas

The Mixe-Zoquean speakers of southern Veracruz continued their tradition of erecting stelae well into the Early Classic Period. According to Kaufman and Justeson (Kaufman and Justeson 2001) "at least two Early Classic monuments from Cerro de las Mesas, Stela 6 and Stela 8,....bear diagnostically epi-Olmec glyphs; two others at the site had texts that are probably but not demonstrably epi-Olmec." As is the case with the Late Formative carvings, stelae from Cerro de las Mesas offer single columns of hieroglyphic texts flanked by ruler-elites in splendid dress. These rulers, shown in profile, extend their hands in a gesture of scattering. In several cases a long stemmed broad-leaf plant extends tail-like from the ruler's waist. These pointed philodendron-style plants touch the base of the textual column. Interestingly, the heart shaped leaves and curving stems are commonly included on Rio Blanco pottery and Terminal Classic Maya Chocola ceramics and seem to be associated with both Veracruz and a sculptural ceramic style.

Many Cerro de las Mesas stelae are highly eroded, the day signs difficult to read. As with the Tuxtla Statuette, the value of the day signs in some cases is inferred by calculating its correspondence with the preceding Long Count date. Based upon Justeson and Kauffman's readings and calculations we have the following 260-day calendric signs at Cerro de las Mesas:

ST 5 9.4.14.1.4 *7 Iguana* (C.E. 529)

ST 8 9.4.18.16.8 *9 Rabbit* (C.E. 533)

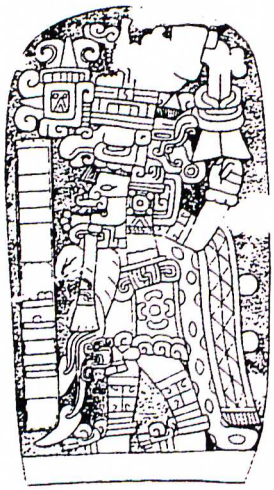


Figure 8.12a

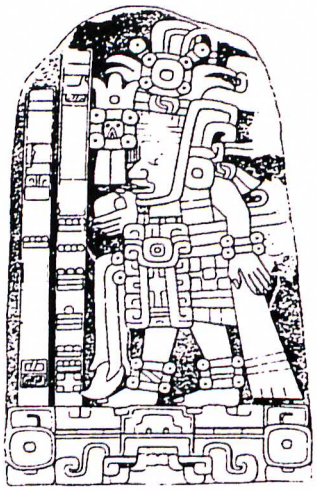


Figure 8.12b

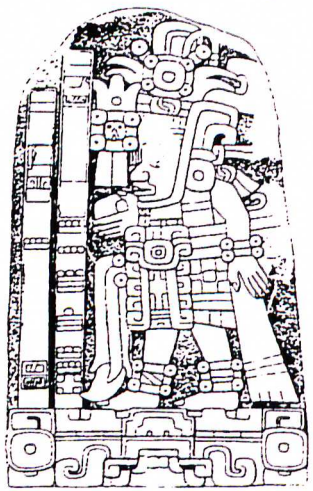


Figure 8.12c

Figure 8.12 Stelae with Long Count dates from Cerro de las Mesas. Stela 5 (8.12a), Stela 6 (8.12b) and Stela 8 (8.12c).

The language of the Cerro de las Mesas stelae is a form of Mixe-Zoquean (Justeson: personal communication). Like earlier epi-Olmec stelae, the inscriptions include Long Count dates. Columns on Cerro de las Mesas carvings are framed in one or

two tall rectangles, messages somewhat abbreviated and defined. Essential information is conveyed here, rather than lengthy narrative. Hieroglyphs have a more sculpted appearance when compared with the light incised line used by earlier artisans.

The corpus including both Formative Period Epi-Olmec writing and Early-Middle Classic Cerro de las Mesas writing is admittedly limited. In large part this may be due to the comparative lack of excavation carried out on the Gulf Coast. Yet apparently at some point during the Classic Period, Veracruz artists develop a penchant for pictorial narrative. We see this predilection manifest in changing modes of representation at Cerro de las Mesas.

Cerro de las Mesas relief sculptures—Stela 4, Stela 15, and Monument 2-- each contain day signs in the 260 sacred calendar. These hieroglyphs label individual human and supernatural agents, as did earlier Cerro de las Mesas sculpture. Yet unlike previous Cerro de las Mesas monuments, Stela 4 and 15 lack Long Count dates. If Monument 2 has a Long Count date it is now too worn to read.

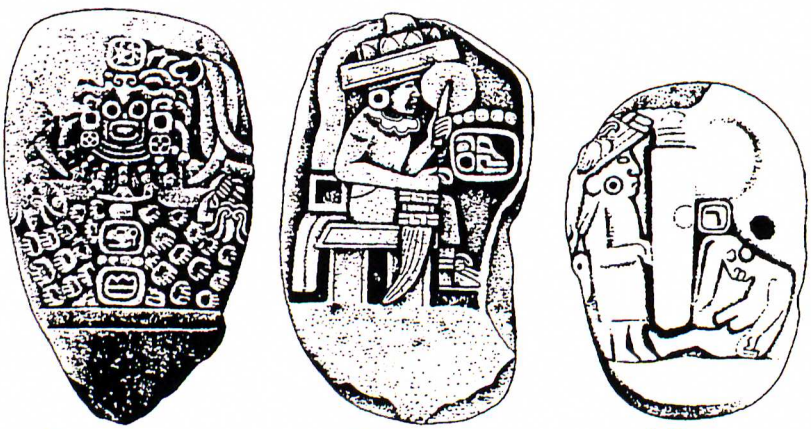


Figure 8.13a 8.13b 8.13c

Figure 8.13 Late Period stelae from Cerro de las Mesas. ST 15 (18.13a), ST 4 (8.13b), Monument 2

Monument 2 (Stirling 1943) from Cerro de las Mesas also shows a female elite wearing a broad brimmed hat. The noblewoman lords over a slumping, naked figure with a square-cartouche day sign above her (?) inclined head, apparently naming the unfortunate victim. A vertical column of worn hieroglyphic text separates the victor and the vanquished. The symmetry of the interaction, the costume worn by the elite figure on the left, and the associated square cartouche day sign all are clear markers for Late Classic southern Veracruz, and certain "foreign influence pockets" within the Terminal Classic Maya Lowlands. Monument 2 is unique because it offers *both* a column of sequential hieroglyphic text, and a square-cartouche day sign functioning independently as a caption—or "nametag"--augmenting the pictorial program.

Owing to the lack of Long Count dates, it is difficult to offer confident dates for these stelae. Iconographic analogies compound the mystery. Cerro de las Mesas Stela 15 shows a full frontal goddess rendered in unmistakable Teotihuacan style. Is this a stylistic revival or a temporal marker?

Stela 15 offers two consecutive hieroglyphs arranged vertically (Stirling 1943: Figure 14A). These read 1 Jaguar, 4 Reed. As Karl Taube notes (Taube 1999) the iconography "is rendered in pure Teotihuacan style," depicting a frontally rendered female deity. Based on the iconography, Stela 15 is probably older than Stela 4 (discussed below). Taube uses the iconography to ascertain that Stela 15 is an example of "Teotihuacan style linear text" (1999: 44-45). I disagree.

While Taube is correct is his assessment of the stylistic influence, the glyphs are classically Mixtequillan. Structurally they violate Taube's own criterion for

differentiating Teotihuacan-style hieroglyphs from those of Veracruz. Speaking on other examples he writes—

> *"...the coefficients appear..in the style of Teotihuacan, with the units of one in the lowest position. Although also common in Zapotec writing, the coefficient orientation is directly opposite the conventional order of the Maya and the neighboring Isthmian region, including the site of Cerro de las Mesas, where the lowest coefficients are usually presented first, then units of five, and finally non-numerical glyphs"* (Taube 1999:44).

The structure of Epi-Olmec day signs conforms to Taube's above stated definition. Calendric signs from Terminal Classic southern Veracruz (discussed at length in the following chapter) also follow this format. Calendric hieroglyphs on Stela 15 are rendered identically to those on Stela 4 from Tlalixcoyan (discussed below).

The day sign Jaguar contained on Stela 15 appears on La Mojarra Stela 1 and on later Rio Blanco ceramics. Referring to a map of the region, the geographic proximity of these sites is immediately apparent. This underscores the idea that the inhabitants of the Mixtequilla-Tuxtlas regions used the same script for the better part of a millennium (if not longer).

The second calendric sign on Stela 15 is interpreted as 4 Cana or Arrow. Since there are two day signs in sequence, the second one might be a Year Bearer sign, rather than representing a day name in this instance. The later Aztecs called a similar sign *Acatl*, meaning Reed. It was one of the four out of twenty day names also functioning as a Year Bearer sign, along with Calli (House), Tochtli (Rabbit) and Tecpatl (Flint). This sign also resembles the upper portion of the day sign on the Chiapa de Corzo stone, where the Long Count (7.16.3.2.13) calculates to the day 6 Acatl (or 6 Ben).

Stela 4 Tlaixcoyan, Veracruz, Cerro de las Mesas culture, is currently dated to the Late Classic period (c. 600-900). Stela 4 shows a figure wearing the broad brimmed hat characteristic of merchant elites (see Chapters 9, 13, and 14). To his right we find a rectangular cartouche-enclosed day sign. The image within the cartouche is interpreted as Ehecatl; his identification presumably based on the figure's prominent ear spool. Above the cartouche is a horizontal row of dots, each slightly dimpled. The glyph has been read as 5 Ehecatl. The five dots as opposed to a bar is an unusual convention at this time and place in history, and the first mark on the left hand side of this row is not clear, as my drawing indicates. I believe that this is more likely 4 Ehecatl or 4 Death (since to my eye the head looks quite skeletal). This day sign, labeling our seated ruler, has the same structural configuration as the day sign on Tres Zapotes Stela C. We will see this same hieroglyphic arrangement on signs on the Central Building Column at El Tajin and on Rio Blanco pottery (see Chapter 9).

The costume of the Stela 4 ruler like that of figures on Rio Blanco pottery, mirrors Cerro de las Mesas Stela 11 (and to a lesser degree Monument 2). Note the collar, headdress, earspools, as well as the copal bags carried by both the figure on Stela 4 and that on Stela 11. Matthew Stirling (1943:34-35) recorded the similarity between these two monuments, observing that these were "the only two monuments at the site carved from the same fine-grained basalt" (ibid). Stirling also noted a curious stylistic counterpart at Santa Lucia Cotzumalhuapa from Terminal Classic Pacific coastal Guatemala.

Were it not for Stela 15, we could confidently date these works to the Late Classic (c. C.E. 790-1000) on stylistic grounds. Whenever the transition took place, Long Count dates eventually disappear in Veracruz and throughout southeastern Mesoamerica.

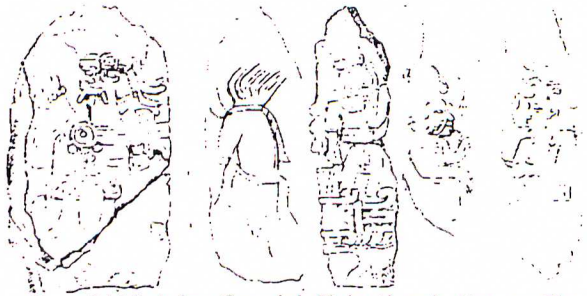


Figure 8.14 Stela from Cerro de la Piedra Alvarado, Veracruz. Cherra Wyllie.

A Cerro de las Mesas stela with relief carving on four sides provides discrete, although possibly related, images. On the front of the monument is an elite, standing in profile. No hieroglyphs accompany him, but otherwise he is similar to other ruler figures portrayed on Cerro de las Mesas stelae. The left-hand side of the monument shows a decapitated figure with a rope around his neck. His hands appear to be bound behind him. At least five rays of blood fan out from his severed neck like a jagged claw. He is probably a sacrificial victim. On the right side of the stone there is another profiled figure wearing high status costume. And finally, on the rear of the monument we find two human figures flanking a double column of hieroglyphs. They face one another in conversation, apparently referring to the text between them. The man to the right appears wearing a ballgame yoke with an attached death's head palma. He is bare-chested, apart from a necklace of thick beads, probably made of jade.

The long columns of text and ruler portraits remind us of earlier Cerro de las Mesas stelae with Long Count dates placing them in about the 6th Century. This is a time

when Teotihuacan was still flourishing and the Maya were producing stelae with Long Count dates. It is not inconceivable that long texts and images merely containing glyphic captions coexisted. Certainly the Gulf Coast corridor was a net, capturing various influences.

It is the images here that deserve closer examination. If this stela dates to the Middle Classic Period, then ballgame decapitation was well established in Veracruz far in advance of its Late Classic appearance at Las Higueras, Aparicio, and El Tajin. If, on the other hand, this stela is late, then longer hieroglyphic texts continued to be inscribed on the surface of free-standing monuments. To venture a guess (on both epigraphic and stylistic grounds), this stela represents a mid point in time in the late 7th or early 8th Century C.E. It exemplifies the confusing eclecticism so characteristic of that era.

However generated, something changes. Veracruz Long Count dates disappear. Throughout Veracruz sequential pictorial narrative replaces linear text in conveying historic events and ritual celebrations. Temporal or nominal indicators offer only the most essential textual information. The Veracruz Late Classic sees revolution in visual communications.

We cannot know for certain what social processes or demographics caused this change. Yet in the years that followed the Veracruz Gulf is home to at least three new (or revised) visual symbol systems. The following chapters (9-12) discuss hieroglyphic writing in Veracruz and its areas of influence in the years C.E. 750-1000.

Chapter Nine
The Visual Structure of Names and Dates In Veracruz and its Areas of Influence

Introduction

Cartouches serve to identify day names in the 260-day calendar of several writing systems, including those of the Maya, Zapotec, Nuiñe, and Xochicalco. The twenty day names follow a prescribed sequence as seen in the chart (Table 9.1) below. Main signs of corresponding day signs are frequently unique from system to system. Yet, in many cases signs in one system merely *appear* to be different from their counterparts in another system. While logographically representing discrete words in non-corresponding languages (e.g. Mayan, Zapotec), hieroglyphs holding the matching position within the day sign sequence often encode the same (or similar) meaning despite this difference in appearance. Conversely, the same day sign might be rendered in a similar manner in more than one hieroglyphic system. When such hieroglyphs appear in isolated contexts, further diagnostic attributes become necessary in order to determine precisely *which* writing system is under consideration.

Using the positional sequence we can identify day signs belonging to a particular system in the following ways:

1. Allowing for scribal, temporal, or regional stylistic variation, there will always be only twenty signs.
2. Even when signs depict images holding the same or corresponding values to those in another hieroglyphic system, each system's representations will exhibit regional and temporal styles.

3. Likewise, the form of the day sign cartouche varies somewhat from system to system.
4. There is a *preferred* layout of the day sign with relation to the placement of the bar and dot denominators.

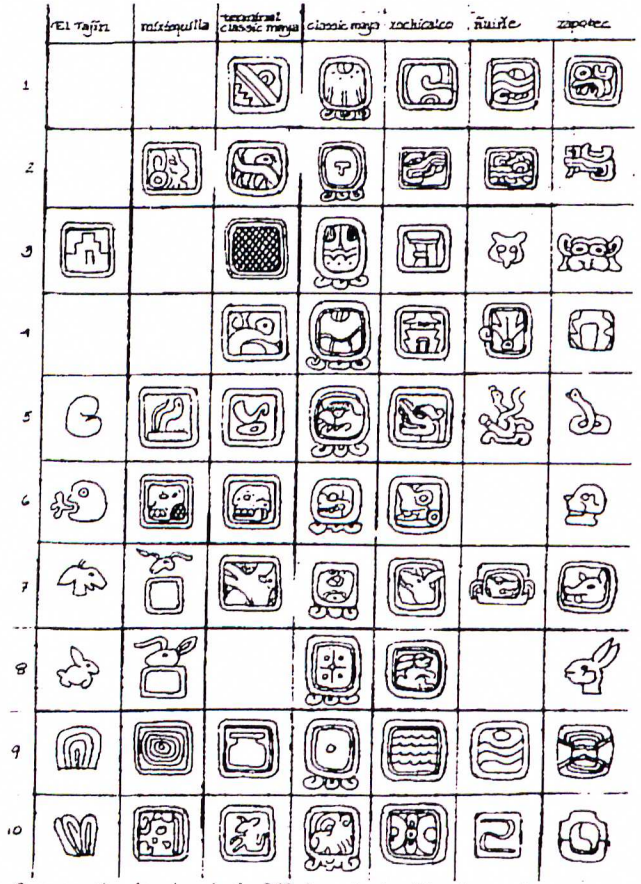


Table 9.1a List of comparative day signs in the 260-day calendar. First three columns are provisional assignations. Cherra Wyllie (using data in last three columns provided by Javier Urcid).

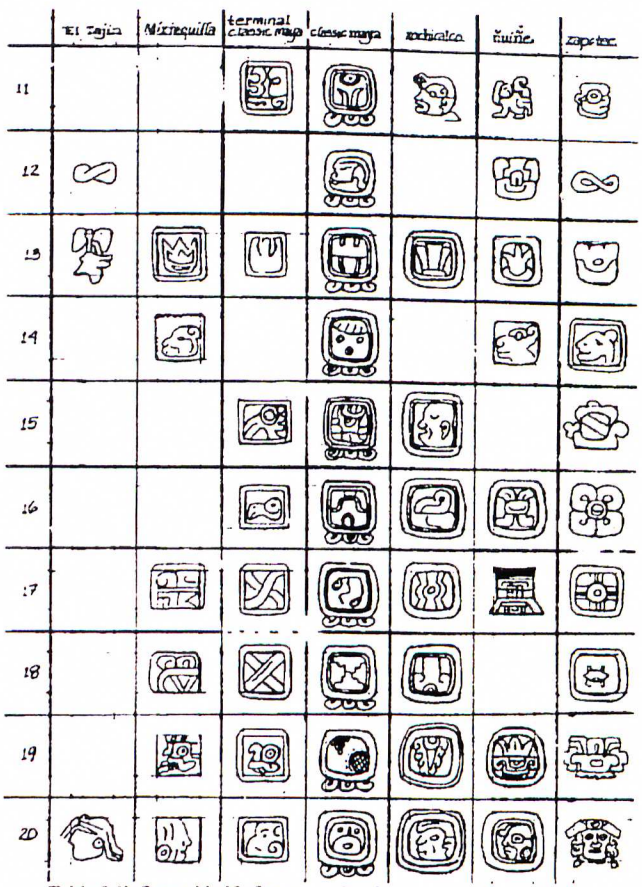


Table 9.1b Second half of comparative day sign list. Cherra Wyllie

Using these criteria we can attempt to identify hieroglyphs with defining properties, thereby distinguishing day signs in one system from those of another. This is especially important since day signs often appear in isolated contexts and without accompanying inscriptions (as in examples from El Tajin or on Rio Blanco pottery). As we shall see, a day sign (or signs) from one system can also be integrated within the hieroglyphic text of another system altogether (as seen at Seibal). Correctly identifying and interpreting day

signs not only allows us to differentiate between systems, but also aids us in recognizing autonomous systems. Likewise, variations help us visually record degrees of change over time and space.

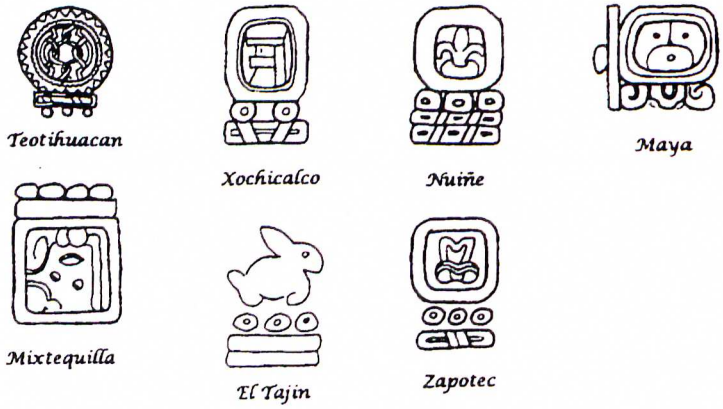


Figure 9.1 Conventions for day names and numeral coefficients in the 260-day Sacred Count in several Mesoamerican cultural areas. Cherra Wyllie

Day signs therefore provide a means to test the viability of writing in Late Classic Veracruz as an independently conceived symbolic system, and to track its evolution and distribution within Veracruz and Mesoamerica.

In this chapter I examine the visual structure of personal names and calendric signs found on architectural and sculptural programs, as well as portable objects from Veracruz and its area of influence. I look more closely at the relationship of the glyphs to the overall pictorial program in subsequent chapters.

Cerro de Las Mesas

As seen in Chapter Nine, change in the nature of writing and monumental art first appears at Cerro de Las Mesas. Ruler portraits accompanied by linear hieroglyphic inscriptions with Long Count dates are discontinued in favor of pictorial scenes with

glyphic captions—generally taking the form of cartouche-enclosed day signs. Assuming an *a priori* knowledge of the stories and players involved in the narrative scenes, public art becomes more accessible to the general populace, and "writing" suddenly exceeds the confinement of linguistic boundaries.

This "devolution" contradicts the expected linear progression from "name-tagging" to complex logo-phonetic writing recording the nuances of spoken language. In Veracruz as in the Maya region, lengthy inscriptions and ruler portraits disappear; in their place "text" is generally confined to day signs within the 260-day sacred calendar. These calendric signs also serve a nominative function—labeling actors within the body of the pictorial narrative.

Cerro de las Mesas shares calendar signs with earlier Epi-Olmec writing. As noted earlier, Cerro de las Mesas stelae continue recording Mixe-Zoquean language in Epi-Olmec script (Justeson and Kaufman 2001; Kaufman and Justeson 2001). Linear texts using Long Count dates provide us with obvious examples of the continuation of Late Formative traditions. Yet day signs in the 260 day sacred calendar also staunchly preserve earlier forms. Late Classic square cartouche signs such as those on Cerro de las Mesas Stelae 4 and 15 retain the same form as those on Tres Zapotes Stela C or La Mojarra Stela 1. We read bar and dot numerals in the same sequence relative to the calendric main sign. The identical formation appears identifying characters on Rio Blanco molded-carved fine paste ceramics.

El Tajin

At Tajin we find hieroglyphs with numerical coefficients integrated within the pictorial programs of relief carvings. These appear on architectural features and portable ceramics. Although found elsewhere at the site, personal names and calendric signs using bar and dot numerals occur abundantly at the Mound of the Building Columns.

Mound of the Building Columns

Situated on an acropolis dominating both the civic and ceremonial centers of El Tajin, the Building of the Columns is believed to be the palace of 13 Rabbit, a prominent El Tajin lord. The ruler's name appears repeatedly on the north column of the palace and on associated Rio Blanco related Fine Relief Blackware (DuSolier 1945).

Each of the three cylindrical columns in the royal compound contains pictorial narrative carved in low relief. Moving up the columns vertically, scenes are divided by horizontal registers, which like the drama itself, wraps around the circumference of the pillar. The theme and content of each of the columns is distinctive. Likewise, the form and function of the hieroglyphic information is markedly different from one column to the next.

North Building Column (Figure 9.2)

Hieroglyphs serve as captions naming several actors in the narrative. The signs identify ballplayers, political or religious figures, and captives. These include the aforementioned 13 Rabbit appearing on at least three tiers of the four-tiered column in addition to six other players in the unfolding drama.

The identifying symbol (such as Rabbit, Deer, or Skull) is situated above the bar and dot numerals (the one exception to this configuration places the identifying glyph to

the left of the numbers). Dots signifying units of one, are placed above bars signifying five. Figure 9.2 shows the hieroglyphs within their pictorial contexts, while Figure 9.3 focuses on the individual hieroglyphs.

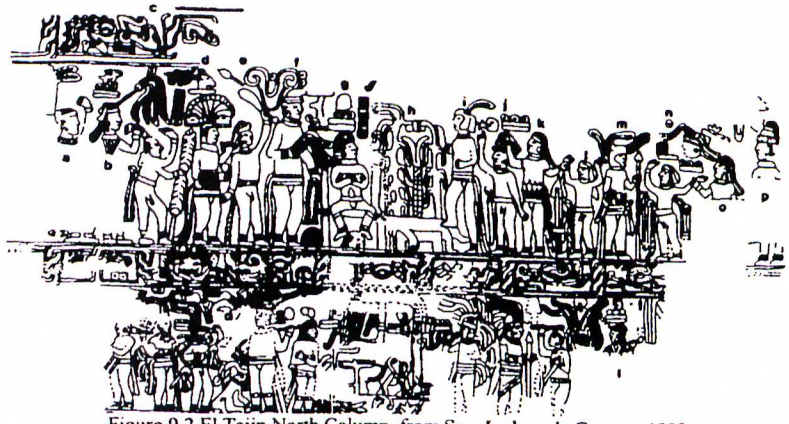


Figure 9.2 El Tajin North Column, from Sara Ladron de Guevara 1999.

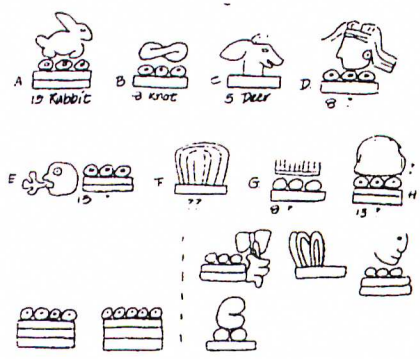


Figure 9.3 Hieroglyphs naming protagonists on the North Column of the Mound of the Building Columns and other structures at El Tajin. This is the first of two types of nominative forms at that site. C.Wyllie.

Sara Ladron de Guevara (Ladron de Guevara 1999) believes that the glyphic signs represent day names in the Mesoamerican 260-day calendar. She identifies them with corresponding signs in the Central Mexican Sacred Count or *tonalpohualli* used by the

later Aztecs: Cuetzpallin (lizard), Miquiztli (death), Tochtli (rabbit), and Malinalli (grass), respectively. This is consistent with the Mesoamerican practice of naming a person by his or her birth day within the sacred calendar.

The hieroglyphic symbols pictorially "read" as Rabbit, Grass, or Deer are not enclosed in any way. Although these signs undoubtedly originate in the twenty day names of the 260-day *tonalpohualli* (known to the Maya as the *Tzolk'in),* they are not day signs *per se*, but rather personal names labeling individuals. The structure of these signs contrasts with hieroglyphs located on the Central Building Column.

Central Building Column (Figure 9.4)

In the second horizonal panel from the top of the Central Building Column, hieroglyphs rest to the right of two or more of the seven individuals wearing lavish costumes and headdresses. While we might initially interpret these as personal names, like those on the North Building Column, on further examination we see that they are structured differently. The hieroglyphs are enclosed in rectangular cartouches (Figure 9.4), while hieroglyphs on the North Column have no such cartouches (Figure 9.3).

The bar and dot numerals rest above these cartouche-enclosed hieroglyphs. In the personal names accompanying figures on the North Column the numeral coefficients are situated below the identifying hieroglyph. There is one exception to this configuration, Figure B, whose identifying glyph is structured like those on scenes of the North Column. The South Column lacks either type of labeling device.

Figure 9.4 Scene from the Central Building Column of the Mound of the Building Columns. Ladron de Guevara 1999.

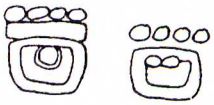


Figure 9.5 Hieroglyphs from the Central Building Column at El Tajin.

The presence of two types of hieroglyphs accompanying actors in the narrative is somewhat baffling. One possibility is that glyphs enclosed by cartouches represent dates, while those lacking cartouches are simply names. Another possibility (the one I find more likely) is that persons represented on the sculpture are from two or more different ethnic groups—each name in his native hieroglyphic script.

Rio Blanco

Molded-carved ceramic bowls from the Mixtequilla region—the so-called *Rio Blanco* pottery—exhibit a variety of lively scenes: mythological interaction featuring anthropomorphic deities, elite rituals full of pomp and splendor, adventures of ballgame heroes, or the procession of long distance traders. Several of these bowls possess square or rectangular cartouche-enclosed signs. Cartouches, like those signs within similar enclosures found on the Central Building Column at El Tajin, are topped with bar and dot numerals. Horizontal bars, representing five, support round dots in denominations of one; these resting securely above the main sign, in the same layout as the cartouche-enclosed signs at El Tajin.

Figure 9.6 provides several examples of these names or dates from the 260-day sacred calendar found on Rio Blanco pottery. Figure 9.7 in this group substitute animal heads (Jaguar, Deer, and Rabbit) for bar and dot numerals. The practice of substitution is possibly analogous to the Maya numerical head variants first identified by Joseph T. Goodman a century ago (Coe 1992). I located two cartouches topped with animal affixes on a bowl from the archaeological site of El Zapotal in the Mixtequilla (now located in the Tuxpan Museum) and another on Rio Blanco bowl K3669. Other examples published by Von Winning and Gutierrez Solana (Von Winning and Gutierrez Solana 1996), also with animal "head variants" both reside in private collections in Los Angeles.

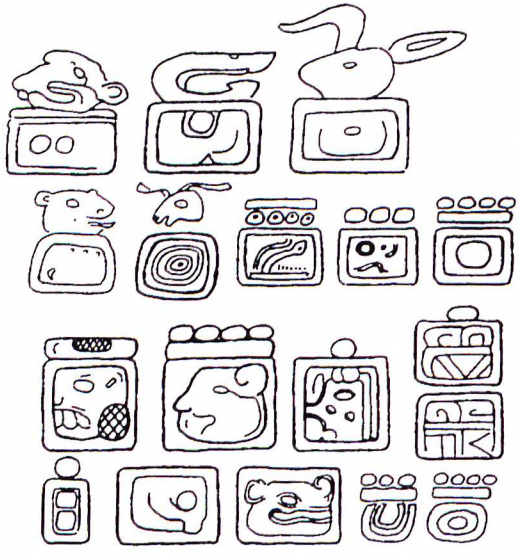


Figure 9.6 Day signs on Rio Blanco ceramics. Cherra Wyllie

Here again, as with the examples from the Building of the Columns at Tajin, we are left to wonder whether these hieroglyphs are personal names or dates. On first examination, they appear to be calendric names serving as captions identifying characters

in the narrative. This is especially provocative, since several of the figures in these scenes appear to be supernatural agents. In a publication for New York's Merrin Gallery (Schildkraut 1996), Linda Schildkraut identifies figures from two bowls in the gallery's acquisition. Schildkraut believes that the narrative conveys exploits of the Maya Hero Twins of Popol Vuh fame. She reads the identifying glyphs on the first vessels as 9 Jaguar, 5 Rodent, *Vucub Caquix* (7 Macaw), Hunaphu (First Lord), and on the second bowl as the Maize God, Ixchel (or *Xmucane),* Hunaphu, God A, and the Cauac Earth Monster. We might ask ourselves whether Late Classic Veracruz vases can be literally interpreted on the basis of Post-Contact Period Quiche Maya mythology. How uniform are these creation stories?

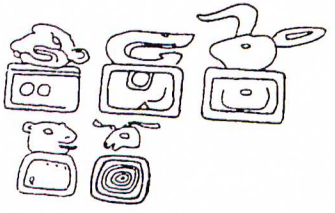


Figure 9.7 Animal head signs or numeral variants on Rio Blanco pottery.

There are several other vessels depicting the same host of supernatural characters found on the first Merrin Gallery bowl. We see figures in these associated bowls with nearly identical attributes, costumes, and gestures. This includes four comparable bowls published by Von Winning and Gutierrez Solana (1996: pages 36, 37, 41, and 43), three of these in private Los Angeles collections, the fourth in the Museum of Anthropology, Xalapa. A fifth example comes from the Princeton Art Museum. As we learned in Chapter 6, molded-carved ceramics are not necessarily uniform mold-made replicas, despite the fact that the bowls frequently exhibit the same pictorial program. To

underscore this point, dimensions of these related bowls vary substantially—with heights ranging from 9.5 cm-11 cm, and diameters ranging from 14 to 17.2 cm.

Details of the six vessels are likewise variable. For example, the hieroglyph identified as Hunaphu in the Merrin article takes an altogether different form in Von Winning and Gutierrez Solana's Figure III.5. Here the dot signifying one is placed above the cartouche of a main sign bearing no resemblance to the one on the Merrin bowl. The bowl at the Museum of Anthropology in Xalapa lacks hieroglyphs altogether, while Von Winning and Gutierrez Solana's Figure III.6 alters the sequence of some of the characters, and places disjointed animal heads that may or may not be hieroglyphs in spaces seemingly reserved for day signs. Whether hieroglyphs or not, they lack either cartouches or numerical coefficients. Finally, Gillett Griffin's Princeton bowl offers a variant to the glyph referred to as 5 Rodent on Merrin Gallery Vessel 1.

The substitutions are peculiar whether these hieroglyphs identify supernatural agents or mortal beings. Dates are equally problematic, since in most cases the same "event" takes place on each of the related bowls.

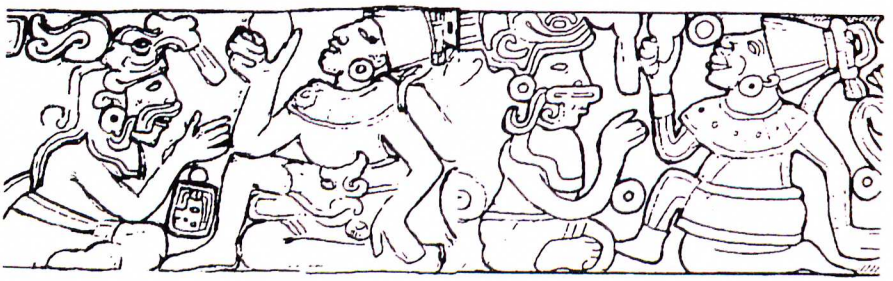


Figure 9.8a

Figure 9.8b

Figure 9.8c

Figure 9.8 Three Rio Blanco bowls showing the same scene with different day signs in the same position.

Star-like "completion" symbols dangle from the upper rim of several Rio Blanco bowls. These signs resemble diagrams for the 260-day count found in both the Aztec Codex Ferjevary-Mayer and Postclassic Maya Madrid Codex—quatrefoils where the readers moves through a succession of spaces marking each day within the sacred calendar. On the Rio Blanco bowls, there is a main sign within the center of this configuration. Above the hieroglyph we have numerical dots accompanied by a loop or tab (like those found in the Xochicalco script). These symbols are undisputedly calendric. They probably name the count of 260-days within the larger passage of linear time. The pairing of these sign may symbolizing the passage from one 260-day cycle into another—signified in the example below by a broken tab accompanied by four dots above the main sign on the left and the looped tab with five dots above the main sign on the right.

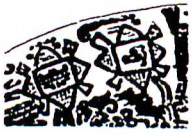


Figure 9.9 Star-like completion signs on Rio Blanco pottery. Von Winning 1996.

Maltrata and Piedra Labrada

Due to their Veracruz location, no discussion of day signs in the Gulf coastal plain is complete without mentioning the hieroglyphic texts from Maltrata and Piedra Labrada.

Maltrata

The Maltrata Monument is a huge monolith from that site now housed in the Museum of Anthropology in Xalapa, Mexico. The stone is carved on both sides, each contain cartouche-enclosed glyphs captioning the pictorial program.

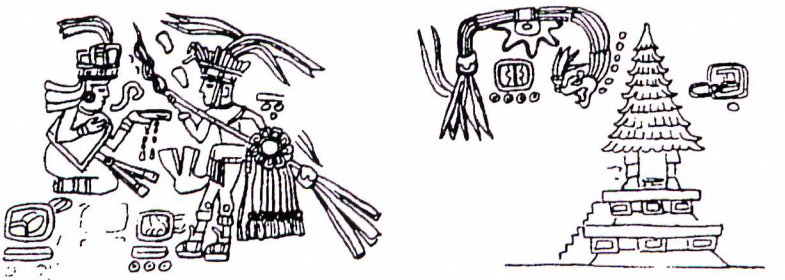


Figure 9.10 Sides 1 and 2 of the Maltrata Monolith. Modified slightly from the original drawing by Mendellin Zenil (1962). Cherra Wyllie.

Alfonso Mendellin Zenil published drawings of the monolith in 1962. Mendellin Zenil's drawings have been reproduced or copied repeatedly since that time by anyone discussing either Maltrata iconography or hieroglyphs. Janet Berlo reads the two hieroglyphs on the north side of the monolith as 7 Rabbit and 8 Rabbit dates (Berlo 1989). Unfortunately, Mendellin Zenil's drawings are flawed and any analysis made on the basis of these drawings likewise must perforce be flawed.

In all fairness, the iconographic details in Mendellin Zenil's drawings seem credible. His mistakes are in the rendering of the hieroglyphic information. Studying and drawing the stone while at the museum in Xalapa, I observed that what the artist mistakes for rabbit ears extending beyond the parameters of the cartouches are actually looped

chords or tabs. Certainly, given accurate drawings Berlo would have understood their significance, since looking at drawings on the east side of the monument (which Mendellin Zenil renders more accurately) she writes—

> *"...the looped chord 1 House glyph suggests links with Xochicalco and other sites in the Central highlands"*

All four of the clearly visible dates from the Maltrata Stone come from the Xochicalco writing system. The logograph in each case is encased in a square cartouche. Yet unlike the day signs at the Veracruz sites discussed so far, the bar and dot numerals are located beneath the encased hieroglyphs with five-bars directly below it, and units of one in the lowest position. Like the wrapped bars discussed in Chapter 7, bars appear doubled and dots punctuated with donut-like holes. Three of the four cartouches contain the aforementioned loops found on hieroglyphs at Xochicalco, Teotenango, and elsewhere.

The first of Mendellin Zenil's so-called "rabbit" glyphs is somewhat eroded, and therefore difficult to identify securely. It carries a coefficient of seven and has a loop or tab in the upper right hand corner. The other hieroglyph on this portion of the monolith also has a tab in the upper right hand corner. The other hieroglyph on this portion of the monolith also has a loop, but can be read as 8 Reptile Eye, a hieroglyph in the Xochicalco day sign list compiled by Javier Urcid.

Hieroglyphs on the east side of the monument—4 Movement and 1 House—also appears in Urcid's day sign list. We find the glyph House at Teotenango, and Motion or Movement at Xochicalco and on the "Lapida de Coatlan," now in the Cuauhauc Museum (Garza Tarazona 1996: 13-16). It should be noted that none of the signs appearing on the

Maltrata Monolith occur on the corpus of day signs amassed thus far for Veracruz and Mixtequilla-related writing—Preclassic *or* Classic.

Piedra Labrada

On the theme of Xochicalco hieroglyphs, we turn our attentions to Piedra Labrada Stela 1. Carved of andesite, the stela contains a row of hieroglyphic text without accompanying pictorial images. The first sign in the sequence, following a fire bundle glyph, has been identified as 7 Reptile Eye (Berlo 1989). The glyph, encased in a semi-rectangular cartouche, rests above a single five-bar with two dots below it—again the Xochicalco or Central Mexican structure rather than the southern Veracruz one. Reptile Eye is also found on inscriptions from Cacaxtla Building A, Xochicalco ST 1, and on portable ceramics from Teotihuacan (Berlo 1989), as well as on the Maltrata Monolith.

Clearly, despite their geographic contexts, the day signs and accompanying hieroglyphic text on the Maltrata Monument and Piedra Labrada ST 1 are not part of the same calendric or hieroglyphic system as the other Veracruz examples cited in this section.

Figure 9.11 Piedra Labrada Monument. Cherra Wyllie.

Beyond The Gulf

Square or rectangular cartouche day signs with numeral coefficients become diagnostic of "foreign" or so-called "Mexican" influence in the Maya lowlands during the Terminal Classic Period.

Chichen Itza

Chichen Itza is replete with iconography and hieroglyphic writing from areas outside those traditionally associated with the Classic Maya. Elements of Veracruz-related iconography form part of the eclectic mix at Chichen Itza. Yet despite relationships in pictorial programs on architectural features, we find none of the square-cartouche hieroglyphs on murals, relief carvings, or ceramics from that site (Schmidt: personal communication). When we do find hieroglyphs in square cartouches, they adorn precious objects—gold, jade, and possibly copper from the Cenote of Sacrifice.

Gold Disks

A few gold disks from the main cenote at Chichen contain non-Maya hieroglyphs: Gold Disk A, Disk J, and Disk I have rectangular glyphs. Judging from published drawings (Lothrop 1952), those on Disk A are unreadable. Two rectangular glyphs, placed alongside one another, stand at the head of two paired hieroglyphic columns (also in square or rectangular frames). The two glyphs heading these columns appear to be topped with numerical coefficients in the form of three dots. It is not readily apparent to which of the two hieroglyphs any combination of the three dots is assigned. The tentative and ambiguous description is a result of difficulty in interpreting the three separate drawings on the remaining section of Disk A, as rendered by artists Noguchi, Baake, and Gleason. Each rendering is quite different. While all three artists show six semi-

rectangular hieroglyphs, only those on Figure 29a clearly show what look like numeral coefficients.

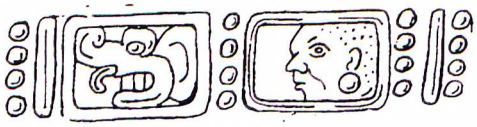


Figure 9.12 Hieroglyphs of Disk J from Chichen Itza

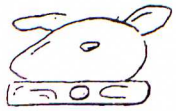


Figure 9.13 Glyph on Disk K

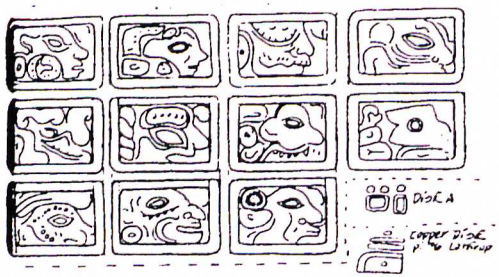


Figure 9.14 Hieroglyphs from Disk I (with smaller glyphs on the lower right-hand side from Disk A and Copper Disk (published by Lothrop)).

Drawings of hieroglyphs are clearer on Disk J. Orienting the disk in such a way that the central figures are upright, two rectangular glyphs decorate the rim just above them. The first has a somewhat reptilian face, possibly symbolizing a serpent or crocodile. It may also be a feathered serpent, and therefore the sign associated with Ehecatl or Wind. Reading from left-to-right in the direction of the glyphic profiles, we see a vertical row of four dots and a bar placed directly before the sign in a square cartouche. The glyph next to it, also in a square cartouche, is preceded by four dots. Within the cartouche is what looks like a man with a shaved head and receding chin, wearing a round earring. In front of his face we see what appears to be a split speech scroll.

We earlier touched upon the problem presented by two day signs placed one after the other. In this case we have an added dilemma: following the second hieroglyph is a

row of four dots (like the four preceding it!). If this isn't enough to confuse us, this is in turn followed by a bar accompanied by four dots *to the right of it*—exactly in the opposite sequence we have come to expect!

There are other hieroglyphs with numeral coefficients on the right and possibly bottom center portion of the disk's rim. The one on the right appears to read 9 Ahaw. Unlike other Maya Ahaw day signs, this oval lacks the encompassing double outline forming the cartouche, and apart from the coefficient accompanying it, this symbol looks nothing like the rectangular signs at the top of the disk.

Disk I has eleven signs divided at four points around its rim. All contain right-facing human and animal heads rendered in profile. Regardless of their placement around the rim with relation to the disk's central image, the hieroglyphs are oriented so that the tops of the heads are towards the rim of the disk, and thereby upright when the disk is rotated. These hieroglyphs are without coefficients, and are difficult to securely correlate with any day signs. Perhaps they are personal names or other markers of group or individual identity. What appears to be an upturned snout of one of glyphs may be a bat or perhaps a buccal masked profile of Ehecatl, the wind god of Veracruz origin.

Disk K lacks square cartouche hieroglyphs. Nevertheless, there is a series of glyphs on the rim. These are situated in the lower left hand corner when the central image is placed upright. One glyph in this sequence calls to mind the rabbit head variant from Rio Blanco bowl K3669, and even the symbol below it looks like a truncated version of the cartouche-enclosed glyph on that vessel. Returning to earlier Gulf Coast forms we can even see a relationship between the bar-like form supporting the animal head on Disk K,

and the double bars forming the foundation for the Month Patrons in Epi-Olmec inscriptions.

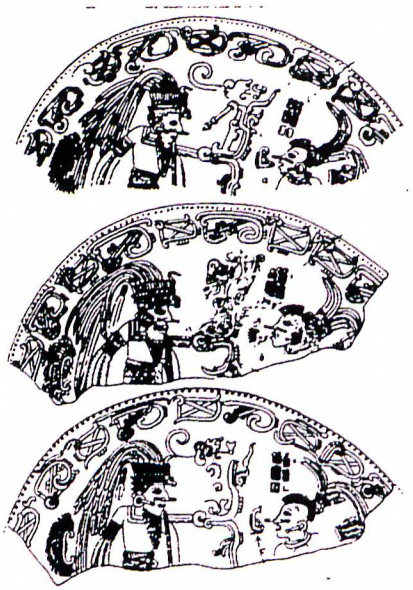


Figure 9.15 Gold Disk A as interpreted by three separate artists.

Carved Jades

Carved jades are also among Cenote treasures. These include hieroglyphs in rectangular enclosures. Placed in single vertical columns and surmounted by bar and dot coefficients, they form another example of possible Veracruz related calendar signs coming out of Chichen Itza. Proskouriakoff's drawings (Proskouriakoff 1974) provide clearly rendered examples.

Figure 9.16 shows one glyph with paired glyphs in a vertical column. The uppermost hieroglyph has a coefficient of one. The animal head rendered in profile is possibly a Jaguar, although this is open to interpretation. The sign below it is prefixed by two bars (ten), but does not contain enough visual information for a secure reading.

Antother jade seems to offer a sequence of dates with the centrally positioned hieroglyph encompassed by a rectangular border. The sign within the enclosure is difficult to identify, although it may be infixed by two dots resting atop two bars.

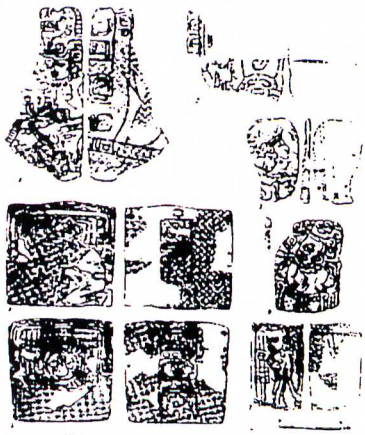


Figure 9.16 Carved jades from Chichen Itza. Drawings by Proskouriakoff 1958.

Seibal

Terminal Classic stelae at Seibal, Jimbal, and Ucanal incorporate enigmatic day signs. These symbols, framed in square cartouches have been the subject of much speculation, including the "foreign invasion" hypothesis—an explanation for the Classic Maya collapse particularly popular during the 1970's.

John A. Graham categorized these stelae as Group IV Monuments (Graham 1990), associating them with a lack of katun declarations, in addition to their foreign, non-Classic features. While iconography alone should seize our attentions here, we first examine Seibal stelae with regard to day signs in the 260-day calendar.

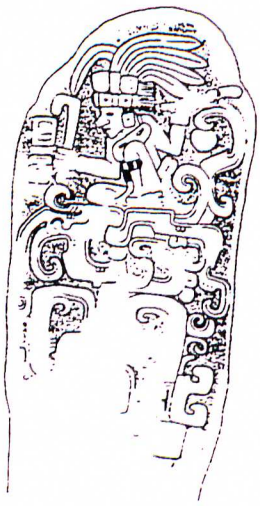
In all chronological categories of stelae at Seibal, we have Mayan inscriptions. Throughout the site's history we also have day signs rendered in true, recognizably Maya form. These include Stela 19 and Stela 17 (Graham 1990:59), some of the last erected at

that site. The square-cartouche day signs on Seibal ST 13, ST 3, and ST 18 therefore do not replace the day signs that the Maya used in one variety or another throughout their written history. The "foreign" day signs, instead, appear to be consciously inserted into the texts. They are substitutions rather than replacements.

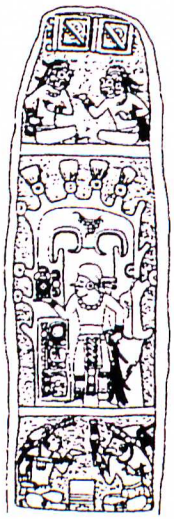
From the standpoint of cohesive design, these signs leap out at the viewer. However, the effort to incorporate these symbols within the overall layout fails; they are somehow too angular, too rigid to be comfortably amalgamated.

Structurally and proportionately Stela 13 exemplifies this lack of visual harmony. The inscription begins with a square-cartouche day sign that Graham reads as 7 Water. The scale of the glyph is nearly four times that of the successive glyph blocks. Sharp edges of the cartouche contrast it with the rounded forms of other comfortably clustered, nearly uniformly sized hieroglyphs.

9.17a Seibal ST 13



9.17b Seibal ST 18



9.17c Seibal ST 3

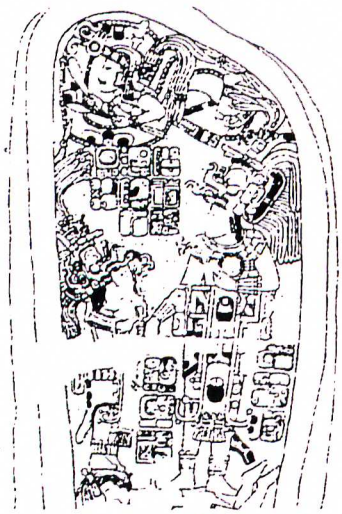
The form of the day sign conforms to several comparable Veracruz examples. Starting from the top, moving down through the text, one sees dots, followed by a

horizontally-placed bar, and finally the day sign—a jug or olla centered within the frame of the cartouche. The ninth day sign has the meaning of Water or Rain in nearly every Mesoamerican sacred calendar. The Maya day name is *Muluc* and is symbolized by a jade bead, metaphorically linked to the preciousness of water. Thompson (1971:77-78) tells us *"There is also a Quiche word mulul with the meaning of pottery jug, which reminds one of the jugs in which the rain gods stored water."* The association between rain and storage vessels is an enduring one. On Late Formative Izapa Stela 1, Chac, the rain god, carries such a container strapped to his back. Nearly one thousand years later, Maya Goddess I pours rain water from an olla in the pages of the Postclassic Dresden Codex. In the interim (and closer to the time period associated with Stela 13), a woman or Goddess in the Late Classic Las Higueras murals from Veracruz pours water from a similar vessel. Muluc, says Thompson derives from the root word *mul*, meaning "to collect, pile up, congregate."

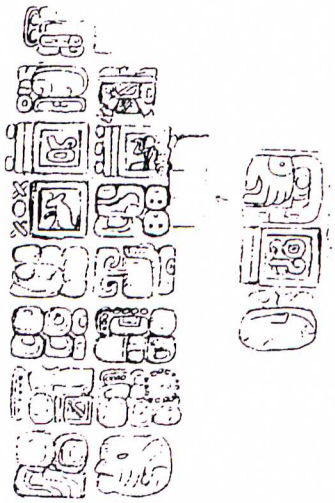
Horizontal registers divide the tall monolith of Stela 3 into a series of three framed scenes, situated one atop the other. On the uppermost tier, two square cartouches hover above a pair of seated figures, facing one another. The figures sit cross-legged, engaged in gestures of animated conversation. They wear Rain God masks.

Bar and dots numerals placed to the left of each hieroglyph direct the reader's eye from left to right. The order is reinforced by the signs within the frames of each cartouche, both identified as Crocodile (Graham 1990), their reptilian open jaws and saw-like teeth oriented to the left. Apart from numeral coefficients of 4 and 5, respectively, the two signs are identical. Tatiana Proskouriakoff first associated these hieroglyphs with the Mexican day sign *Cipactli* (Proskouriakoff 1950:153).

Seibal Stela 18 shows two hieroglyphs, one above the other, and both with coefficients to the left. The uppermost sign is enveloped in a square cartouche, its central image unreadable. The cartouche rests on a pedestal of two scroll-like feet on either side of a semi-circular loop—a device frequently used to support day sign cartouches of the Classic Maya Tzolk'in. The second sign in this sequence is tentatively identified as 2 Yaxk'in the Haab (Graham 1990:70). The coefficient is eroded and secure identification difficult.



9.18a Ucanal ST 1 (Ian Graham)



9.18b Inscription from Jimbal ST 2 (C. Wyllie)

Pabellon Molded-Carved Ceramics

Pabellon Molded-carved Fine Orange ceramics not only resemble Rio Blanco pottery; both contain hieroglyphs in square cartouche form. These hieroglyphs, as on Rio Blanco pottery, caption or supplement pictorial scenes on vessels.

Unlike Rio Blanco pottery many of the Pabellon bowls contain hieroglyphic bands just beneath the rim of the vessel. In some cases these bands, offering sequential

hieroglyphic inscriptions, are comprised of a distinctly non-Classic Maya script, while in other cases the writing is recognizably Mayan. The square cartouche-enclosed signs, on the other hand, are nearly always located beneath these bands within the main body of the vase or bowl.

We find glyphic names or day signs situated between two facing figures on both Pabellon bowls and vases. Pabellon vessels contain a variety of pictorial programs, but it is almost always accompanying paired figures that we find the square-cartouche day signs. There are a couple of exceptions to this: the first is a hieroglyph with a coefficient of three forming part of the vertical hieroglyphic text on a Pabellon sherd from Waxaktun. Yet the Waxaktun sherd is the only example that I came across with a day sign accompanied by a numerical coefficient within a longer glyphic sequence of non-calendric signs. The main sign in this case is interesting because it appears frequently without a cartouche in several "non Maya" inscriptions from Pabellon glyph bands and column sequences.

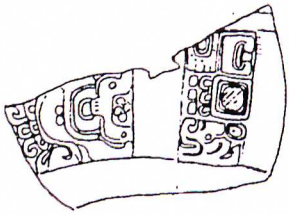


Figure 9.19

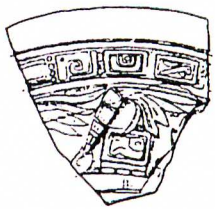


Figure 9.20

Figure 9.21

9.19 Pabellon sherd x-1 from Waxactun (C.Wyllie), drawn from collection of the National Museum of Anthropology, Guatemala.
9.20 Pabellon sherd 63-33-20/22812 from Altar de Sacrificios (C.Wyllie), drawn from Harvard Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology collection.
9.21 Day sign on Pabellon Molded-carved Fine Orange bowl in private collection, Guatemala.

The circular sign with its interior cross-hatching resembles the phonetic *pa* of Maya writing. Day signs are generally logographic rather than phonetic, and the presence of the cartouche proposes a non-phonetic reading. The darkness of the cross-hatching

leads me to propose a non-phonetic reading. Perhaps the darkness conveyed by the cross-hatching signifies "night" or even "darkness" itself, as in the Maya day sign *Akbal*. We see the coefficient to the left of the hieroglyph—a reading order compatible with the top-to-bottom and left-to-right sequence, generally the standard format in both Maya and southern Veracruz day signs and inscriptions. Thus far, this arrangement conforms to cartouche-enclosed hieroglyphs from: 1) the central column on the Mound of the Building Columns at El Tajin, 2) Rio Blanco pottery, 3) day signs on earlier Epi-Olmec monumental scupture, and 4 .a certain subset of Terminal Classic stelae from Seibal, Ucanal, and Jimbal. Yet apart from this Waxactun pot sherd, in other examples of names and calendric signs from Pabellon wares the position of the numeral coefficient relative to the glyphic day sign seems altogether random. We find bars and dots placed *above* the sign, *below* the sign, and to the *right* and *left* of it—often within the same scene!

A single day sign inhabits the central space between two warrior elites on a Pabellon bowl belonging to artist Barbara de Nottebaum of Guatemala (Figure 9.21). We can read this sign as 7 Death—Death or Skull being a common day sign occupying the third position in several Mesoamerican sacred calendars. The toothy skeletal head in its square cartouche balances perfectly on the numerical coefficients below; the five-bar perched on two widely spread dots, as though the sign is carried on a skateboard.

We relate the top-to-bottom sequence (the day sign above a bar, which in turn is above dots) with the hieroglyphic scripts of central Mexico and Oaxaca, rather than those in southeastern Mesoamerica. Yet these hieroglyphs appear more like those from Veracruz and other related sites. The glyphs are angular, with less line curvature than

those of other systems. The five bars are long and narrow, unlike the doubled or wrapped bars that we frequently see at Xochicalco or Monte Alban.

Skull or Death is one of several names or day signs found on Merrin Gallery Rio Blanco bowl K974. Comparison of day signs from several ancient Mesoamerican writing systems show similar skeletal head hieroglyphs in the sixth day position, including those from Zapotec, Xochicalco, and Mixtec hieroglyphic scripts, The sign is less comparable visually to *Cimi,* the Maya sign symbolizing Death.

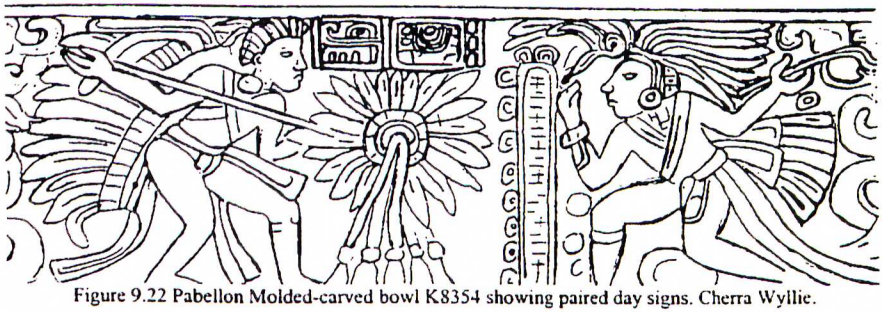


Figure 9.22 Pabellon Molded-carved bowl K8354 showing paired day signs. Cherra Wyllie.

Two nearly identical Pabellon Molded-carved bowls—K8354 and K4791—both have paired warrior-elites framing two day signs in rectangular cartouches. Placed side by side and pressed into the rim of the vessel, the first glyph reads 5 Crocodile. The main sign is similar to that on Seibal Stela 3, and appears on other Pabellon Molded-carved vessels.

The identity of the second of the two hieroglyphs is less readily recognizable, although its form (like the glyph of the Waxactun sherd) appears in non-Maya hieroglyphic texts on Pabellon glyph bands and vertical columns. We see nothing in the Maya corpus of day signs resembling this in the slightest. This is without precedent in

day sign lists of other Mesoamerican scripts. As a day sign, its appearance is unique to the writing or calendric system it represents.

Located on the sign itself are concentric U shapes radiating out from a central circle at the top of the hieroglyph. A numeral coefficient of eight (three vertically placed dots succeeded by an upright five-bar) flanks the hieroglyph on its righthand side. In contrast, the bar signifying five precedes the Crocoldile day sign to its left. Assuming that we read the sequence from left to right we have: numeral followed by day sign followed by day signs followed by numeral.

We find even more ambiguous layout on Pabellon Molded-carved barrel shaped vases. A vessel on display at the National Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Guatamala has a sequence of two sets of paired day signs. In the first pair, one hieroglyph is placed directly atop the other; yet coefficients are placed differently relative to the glyphs. In A-1 we find dots and bars directly over the day sign, while in A-2 the dots and bars border the symbol to its left. In the pair beneath it (glyphs B-1 and B-2) bar and dot numerals are beneath the signs.

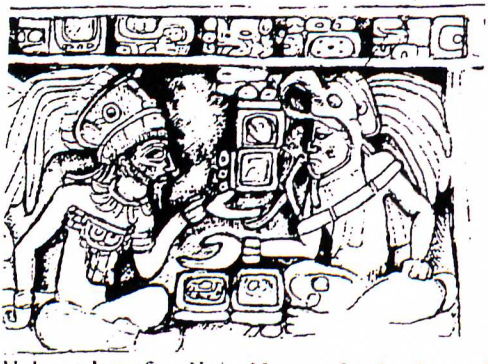


Figure 9.23 Pabellon Molded-carved vase from Nation Musuem of Archaeology and Ethnology, Guatemala (probably from Waxactun). Drawing by Cherra Wyllie

Viewing coefficients relative to their day signs on Pabellon Molded-carved vases from Waxactun, Seibal, and Altar de Sacrificios. Numeral placement does not follow the expected patterns. Nevertheless, there seems to be a series of conventions used with square cartouche signs in the Maya region—whether on monumental sculpture or portable objects:

1. When bar and dot coefficients are situated above the day sign, dots occupy the highest position above bars.

2. When bar and dot coefficients are to the left of a day sign, dots are to the left of bars.

3. When bar and dot coefficients are to the right of a day sign, dots are to the left of bars (in the same sequence as their placement left of the day sign).

4. When bar and dot coefficients are beneath the day sign, bars occupy the highest position, above dots; the entire vertical arrangement directly opposite of that used when coefficients are above the day sign.

We are left to wonder whether location of coefficients has a semiological function. This is particularly pertinent, since the meaning imbued in the pairing of these day signs is not immediately apparent. Recall, however, that at Cerro de las Mesas we also have paired day signs.

Southern Mesoamerica

El Salvador

In *Secret In Stone: Hachas and Palmas From Southern Mesoamerica* (Shook and Marquis 1996), Edwin Shook and Elayne Marquis publish an interesting photograph of a palma reputedly from the Department of Chalatenango, Piedras Gordas, El Salvador, now in a private collection. This palma contains square-cartouche hieroglyphs. The connection

with ballgame paraphernalia immediately suggests possible connections with Late Veracruz culture.

Shook and Marquis submitted photos of the palma to Stephen Houston. His response, published in this volume (1996:229) states—

> "*The text was read one column at a time probably beginning with one on the left (let's designate them A and B, respectively). Almost all the individual elements are identifiable (such as the inverted conch shell at A2), although rather unhappily, I can't make much sense of the overall inscription. I can say, at least, that the glyphs with square cartouches (b4-b5a) are sequent day signs of Terminal Classic form; following a suggestion by David Stuart, I would read them as 13 Etznab, 1 Cauac, 2 Ahau, although this is a bit speculative (cf Jimbal Stelae 1 and 2). The combination of these day signs, along with the form of the other glyphs, leads me to think that this object must date to the years between 10.2.0.0.0 and 10.4.0.0.0. Of course, these dates should be useful in dating the style of other artifacts in this class.*"

Houston and Stuart use the Classic Maya day names Etznab, Cauac and Ahau. The first hieroglyph in the sequence has two curved bands forming a wavy *X*. the Maya day sign Etz'nab also forms an X of stepped or wavy lines. On the Piedras Gordas palma, however, the two crossed bands of double thickness lean to the right, as though spinning in clockwise motion. This illusion of movement suggests a connection with the day sign Ollin or Motion. Associated with earthquakes, Ollin is the Aztec or Mexica day sign holding the seventeenth position I the sequence of day signs. The equivalent day sign in the Maya Tzolk'in is Caban, meaning Earth. Etz'nab, the eighteenth day sign, relates to the Mexican sign Tecpat'l or Flint. According to Eric Thompson, the Maya glyph represents a pressure-flaked blade (Thompson 1971:87).

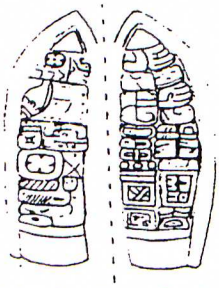


Figure 9.24 Palma from Piedras Gordas, El Salvador.

In light of the dispersal of square cartouche day signs, are we looking at Maya day signs in Terminal Classic or regional style (perhaps an "aberrant" form of Classic Maya hieroglyphs) or day signs from the Gulf Coast? Have the Maya inserted "foreign" day signs into their texts, or have they merely borrowed a "Classic Veracruz" appearance?

We see a transformation in the overall appearance of Maya day signs. Their rectangular shape reflects exposure to non-Maya ways of conveying information. That the Maya should adopt or integrate these stylistic traits comes as no surprise. During this same period (C.E. 800-100) the Maya assimilate a wide array of outside ideas and influences (see Chapter 13). The structure of these day signs, the materials and iconography associated with them all suggest that, at the very least, strong aesthetic influence derived from Veracruz.

And what if these are not foreign-influenced, but actual foreign signs? On the Piedras Gordas palma, as in stelae from Seibal, Jimbal, and Ucanal, and on certain examples of Pabellon Molded-carved Fine Orange ceramics, we find square cartouche hieroglyphs inserted into what are otherwise Mayan inscriptions. These "non-Maya" hieroglyphs appear just after the Classic collapse. They may herald a new era or emerging social order in the wake of that fall.

The Old World offers us useful analogies in its own development of time keeping and numbering systems. Recall that in our own culture we use Roman-derived script. In most instances, however, we do not use Roman numerals; we use Arabic ones. The Arabic numbering system found its way into the Western tradition well after the fall of the Roman Empire. The adoption of Arabic script was not a part of this transition, and obviously for most of Europe the adoption of this numbering system was not a forced conversion.

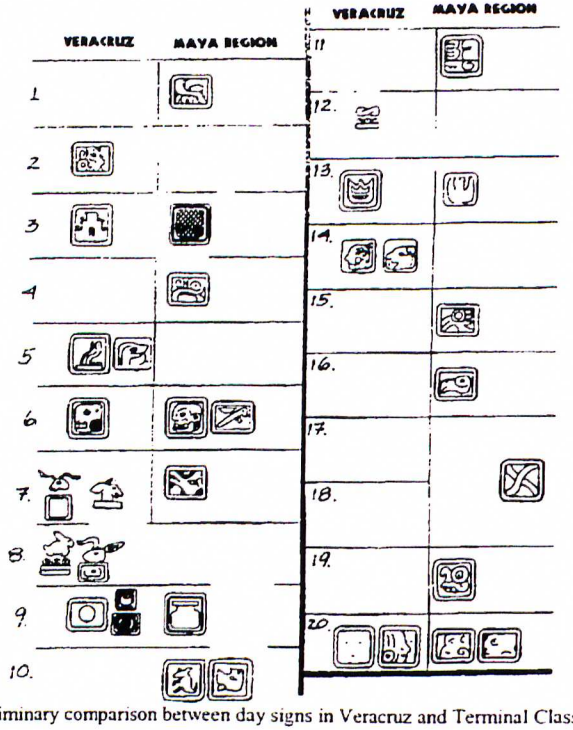


Figure 9.25 Preliminary comparison between day signs in Veracruz and Terminal Classic Maya variety.

Chapter Ten
Place Names and Symbols of Group Affiliation

Background: Early Toponyms

The rendering of *toponyms*, or place signs, found distinct expression in the Mesoamerican cultural and geographic regions of Central Mexico, Oaxaca, the Maya lowlands, and Gulf Coast. Between approximately 150 B.C.E. and 150 C.E. the earliest recognizable place names appear in Mound J, Monte Alban II (Marcus 1992:175), taking the form of the Zapotec hill sign. The hill sign consists of a single-stepped truncated pyramid viewed in profile. Diagonal lines move through the body of the stepped form; a convention that in later Mixtec codices identifies natural features: stratigraphic colored layers of earth and rock. Stylized foliage protrudes from the upper level of each hill, further alluding to the notion of landscape. Atop the hill glyph sits a glyphic element, such as an animal or a plant, identifying the specific location. Mound J has carved slabs with fifty such toponyms. A final element in these carvings is an upside down human head in distinctive headdress; the inversion of the figure interpreted as indicating a place or polity, conquered or otherwise subjugated (ibid).

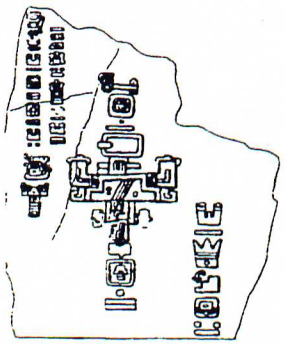


Figure 10.1 Hieroglyphs from Mound J, Monte Alban

Figure 10.2 Zapotec step fret toponym

The Zapotecs used this glyphic symbol to denote place, from its inception in the Late Formative Monte Alban II into Late Classic Monte Alban IIIb. Throughout its duration, the glyph retains the same fundamental shape, although foliage is often absent and identifying symbols are frequently located within the main body of the place sign, rather than resting on its surface (as in the case of Monte Alban ST 4). Zapotec toponyms represent schematic hills or temples, indicating the topographic or human landscape.

At Late Formative Izapa in the southern Chiapas highland we see a similar symbol at the base of both Stela 12 and Stela 14. In nearby Kaminaljuyu a warrior stands atop a comparably shaped terrestrial platform on Stela 11. This southern highland variant, however, is an integrated part of the pictorial iconography, rather than a "hieroglyph." The element bears similarity to earlier Olmec symbols for natural and topographic features, which apparently evolved into later Mesoamerican visual vocabulary.

Figure 10.3 Kaminaljuyu Stela 11

Javier Urcid points out that the platforms supporting figures on Izapan stelae, such as the one found on Monument 42 at Bilbao (Urcid Serrano 1992:172, and Figure

4.121b) bear some relation to the noncalenderical variant of Glyph U in the Zapotec system. Iconographic forms of Glyph U suggest "The Jaws of the Sky" (ibid [Caso y Bernal 1952]) or "Cosmic Sky Dragon" (ibid [Shaplin 1975]); oddly appropriate designations, when we consider the enigmatic backdrop of winding reptilian creatures on later Pabellon molded-carved vessels.

We see place personified by a level of anthropomorphic or zoomorphic forms supporting action on the plane overhead on carved stelae from El Baul, Abaj Takalik, Izapa, and Kaminaljuyu. Earth and water are alive and animated in Izapan art. On Stela 11, Kaminaljuyu, a platform supports a ruler in Bird Costume; the open mouth and front teeth of the toponym sprouting stylized plants on either side of him. His garments and accessories are replete with imbedded hieroglyphs, including the cut section of a step-fret toponym, emitting foggy volutes, set against the lower right side of his kilt.

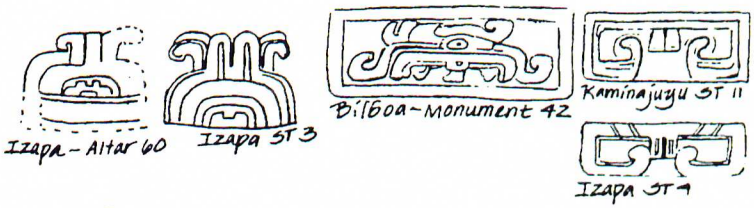


Figure 10.4 Platform-style toponyms from the Guatamala Pacific Coast

A somewhat similar symbol to the platform on Kaminaljuyu Stela 11, found on Izapa Stela 1, provides a sky band (the so called "Jaws of the Sky") framing an early figure of the rain god, Chac. Chac stands on a living body of water, characterized by serpent heads on either end of its wavy-metered form. These dual serpent heads feature prominently in the ceremonial bars of early Maya rulers (Miller and Taube 1993:150) or in Veracruz art from the Classic period.

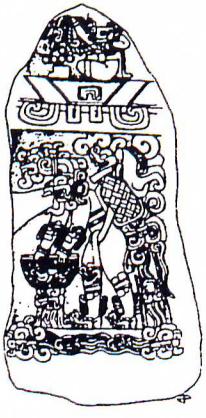


Figure 10.4 Izapa Stela 1, showing the Rain God.

Meanwhile, on the southern Gulf Coast of Veracruz, we find what look like stepped hill hieroglyphic toponyms on La Mojarra Stela 1, during this same early developmental phase in graphic conventions (C.E. 150). The signs found in La Mojarra's Epi-Olmec text are part of a continuous inscription; text dominated, rather than image dominated. On the surface, it seems as though this form of rendering place names was in use in the Veracruz-Tabasco coastal plain for nearly a millennium. Yet decipherment of Epi-Olmec text by Kauffman and Justeson (including La Mojarra Stela 1, the Tuxtla Statuette, O'Boyle Mask and Chiapa de Corzo sherd) shows place names entirely lacking in these texts. Stepped fret signs appear to have purely syllabic value in these cases.

Figure 10.5 Epi-Olmec phonetic sign with the appearance of a toponym. Justeson and Kaufmann.

One possible exception to this is Tres Zapotes Stela C, yet another example of Epi Olmec writing. Substantial attention has been given to the Long Count and

accompanying text on the reverse of this monument. The obverse shows a ruler seated on an austere, mask-like thrown. Tracing the sides of the symmetrical grouping of rectangles forming the face and ear flares of the ruler's anthropomorphic perch, reveals a stepped-platform, indicative of place. It is simultaneously temple, mountain, and the sacred seat of rulership. Like the animated platforms of rulers shown on Izapan stelae, the constructs below him suggests that he is situated, supported, and sanctioned by the underlying god that is the earth itself.

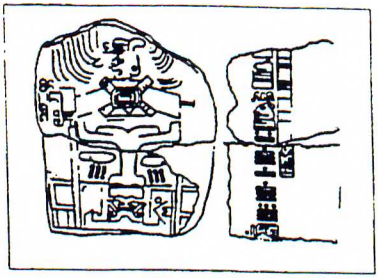


Figure 10.6 Tres Zapotes Stela C showing ruler seated on a throne.

The notion of rulers seated at the threshold of a vital earth creature predates writing as a prevalent theme in Olmec iconography. We see it in Chalcatzingo Petroglyph 1, the seated Queen nestled in the breathing, amphibian-like cave; or the ruler atop a jaguar throne painted on the walls of the Oxtotitlan Caves in Guerreo, his divine bird costume and placement on a full-frontal earth deity strangely reminiscent of Kaminaljuyu Stela 11. Closer to the Veracruz-Tabasco homelands, the famous La Venta Altar 4 shows the carving of an Olmec ruler sitting tailor fashion at the entrance to a portal beneath an overhanging band—a jaguar mask carved in relief featured prominently in the center. Like the depiction on Oxtotitlan, such monumental sculptures were thought to have served as actual thrones (Miller 1996:27). On it we can imagine the ruler sitting at the

other Teotihuacan symbolism becomes incorporated in iconography throughout Mesoamerica.

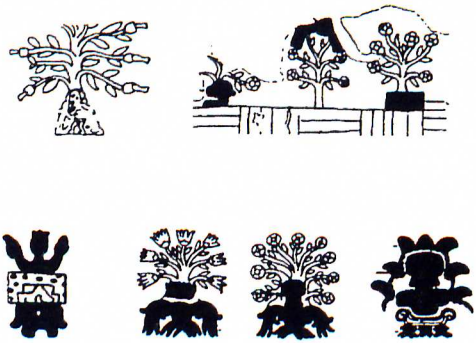


Figure 10.9 Teotihuacan style hieroglyphs, from Taube.

There are no known emblem glyphs in the Maya lowlands prior to the Classic Period. Writing, the demarcation of boundaries, and dynastic succession all seem to appear as interrelated phenomena—manifestations of political organizations and power. Regional identity is amalgamated with that of its ruling dynasty. The affixes *chu 'lel* (or *k'ul)* and *ahaw*—which can be translated as "holy lord"—precede the individual main sign, associated with a given geo-political territory or dynasty. Location is personified in the identity of the ruler or ruling house. The *ben-ich* glyphs, first recognized by Heinrich Berlin during the 1950's, take the form of the bench-style throne and cushion upon which the Maya *ahaw*, or king, is seated in rulership. I believe that this conceptual fusion of person and place is unique to the Maya. While the notion of the sacred (embodied in hills, trees, or even temples) is inherent in other Mesoamerican place names, the Maya alone delineate terrain as *that contained within the realm of the god-king.*

Late Classic El Tajin

At El Tajin place signs take the form of step-fret altars integrated within the picture plane of several carved relief panels. Priests in ceremonial costume conduct sacrifices, their victims splayed out across toponymic platforms. Icon and action are tightly intermeshed in the content and flow of the narrative; so much so that at first our eye does not register that these are glyphs at all. They appear merely as props on the stage of political or mythological drama. Image and text not only interrelate in these panels—they are one and the same.

The toponyms, as such, are two, sometimes three tiered platforms encased in outline framing them on the stepped sides and upper surface. The structure of the glyphs resembles Zapotec toponyms from Monte Alban. Recall that Zapotec toponyms are thought to represent schematic temples or symbolic hills or mountains. Within the body of the form we find the identifying symbol. There are five step-fret toponyms and four such symbols at El Tajin.

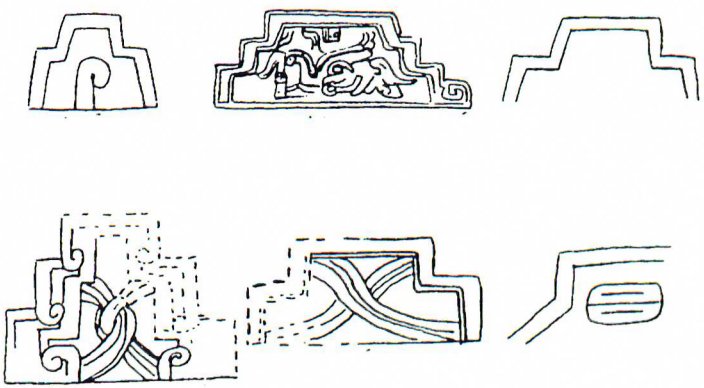


Figure 10.10 Toponyms from El Tajin. Left to right, top to bottom: a) Panel 5, Pyramid of the Niches, b) Panel 1 Pyramid of the Niches, c) Mound of the Building Columns, d) Panel 5 Pyramid of the Niches, e) North Ballcourt panel. Drawings by Cherra Wyllie.

Action frequently takes place over a toponym, as can be seen on Pyramid of the Niches Panel 1. At the center of the toponymic altar we find an odd zoomorphic creature; a deity perhaps. I believe this figure is the same one found on a painting from El Tajin Building I. Note that in the mural we see the being encased within a similar form; yet here the ground line is removed and the step-fret form is mirrored in the space below, creating a wide, cross-shaped enclosure.

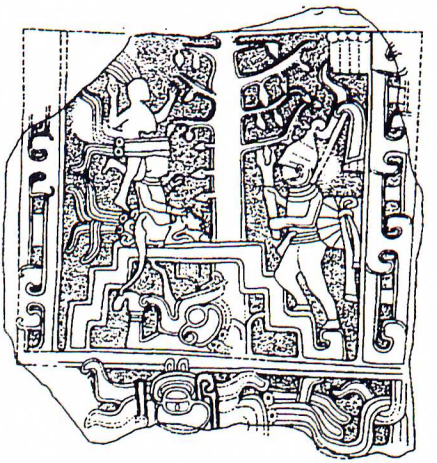


Figure 10.11 Pyramid of the Niches Panel, from Kampen 1972

Art historian and chemist Diana Magaloni conducted pigment analysis on several Mesoamerican murals including those at Teotihuacan, Bonampak, Cacaxtla, and El Tajin. Magaloni's analyses demonstrate that the chemical composition of Tajin paintings share certain selected characteristics with mural paintings, both at Teotihuacan and in the Maya region (Magaloni, et al. 2001). Yet pigment, styles, and techniques are more that hybrids or usurpations, Magaloni asserts, since Tajin artists applied and configured materials in new and innovative ways (Magaloni).

Pyramid of the Niches Panel 1 toponym, like Tajin murals, assembles disparate influences. The step-fret base, as mentioned, takes on the Zapotec form, in use in Oaxaca since the Formative Period. A tree emerges from the interior of the altar. Unlike the foliage emerging from early Monte Alban IIa inscriptions, these are fully flowering trees, akin to those found depicted in the mural paintings of Teotihuacan. Wealth grows on trees, or so it would appear, since on closer examination we discover that these are not blossoms (or even buds) at all, but a fruit or nut of some type, probably cacao pods.

The tree emerges out of the creature framed in the toponym, his head upturned. A figure to the left ascends steps, suggesting that this is as much temple as altar. He carries a club or torch. We see him approach a feline, its long tail swinging contentedly as he lies stretched out over the summit of the structure. An attendant strokes the creature's head.

Foliage sprouts from the navels of the dead in several scenes located throughout El Tajin—a symbol of the sacrifice required within the continual natural cycles of death and renewal. The regeneration of life would have been apparent to horticulturalists in the steamy greenhouse-like environment of the southern Gulf corridor. But the theme is ubiquitous in Mesoamerica, giving form to the perceptual meter of ancient lifeways, as well as the conceptual workings of native cosmology.

Figure 10.12 Tree sprouting from skeleton on sculpture from the Mound of the Building Columns. Drawing by Sara Ladron de Guevara 1999.

On the southwest Panel of Tajin's South Ballcourt, a priest in bird costume officiates a sacrifice, conducted on the surface of a step-fret altar or temple platform. The locale in question remains unidentified, apart from a descending form, which looks very much like our feline tail from Pyramid of the Niches Panel 1.

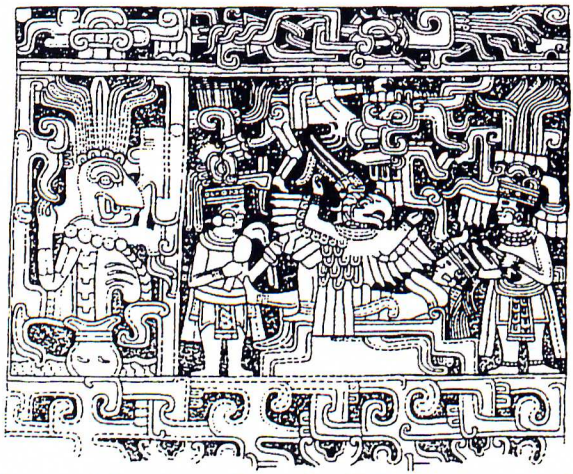


Figure 10.13 South Ballcourt Panel 2 from El Tajin after Kampen 1972.

Pyramid of the Niches Panel 5 shows two step-fret toponyms with different interior signs; their relative importance suggested by scale. Glyph Y, like other toponyms at El Tajin, is two-tiered. Its main sign is a crested wave or curl oriented to the right. We see a similar toponymic hieroglyph on the tall tripod legs of a clay vessel (now in a private collection) thought to originate from El Tajin (Zengel 1968: Figure 73). A human figure with large ear flares and an elaborate headdress stands atop the form. Although in this example the platform is three-tiered, the main sign is the same.

The main sign of the larger toponym in Pyramid of the Niches Panel 5 consists of two outward-curving bands hooked at their centers, forming a loosely twisted braid. The twist tie sign is pervasive at Tajin: forming a glyph of intertwined arms or serpents

separating two players in the South Ballcourt panel. It is the main insignia on carved depictions of shields and copal bags (discussed at greater length below), and an integral iconographic component amid the interlocking scrolls and suspended supernatural figures in the lavish frames surrounding narrative scenes. The sign is so ubiquitous at El Tajin that its meaning as the identifying symbol for the city seems apparent. We find this symbol further afield, such as on a polychrome vessel from Honduras. Yet here its identity as a place name is less secure. It could easily be a decorative device.

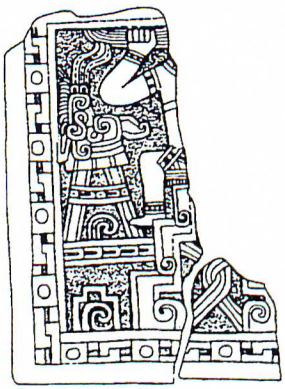


Figure 10.14 Pyramid of the Niches Sculpture 5, from Kampen 1972.

Many motifs at Tajin are common not only as signs and symbols, but also as design features. As such, we find them throughout space and time in ancient Mesoamerica. Good design holds universal appeal, and such signs frequently recycle as symbols with a myriad of associated meanings. Therefore, I want to make note of the appearance and distribution of these signs, while reminding the reader of Quilter's approach on discerning properties of continuity and disjunction. Assume neither. Explore both (Quilter 1996).

On the southwest Panel of Tajin's South Ballcourt, a priest in bird costume officiates a sacrifice, conducted on the surface of a step-fret altar or temple platform. The locale in question remains unidentified, apart from a descending form, which looks very much like our feline tail from Pyramid of the Niches Panel 1.

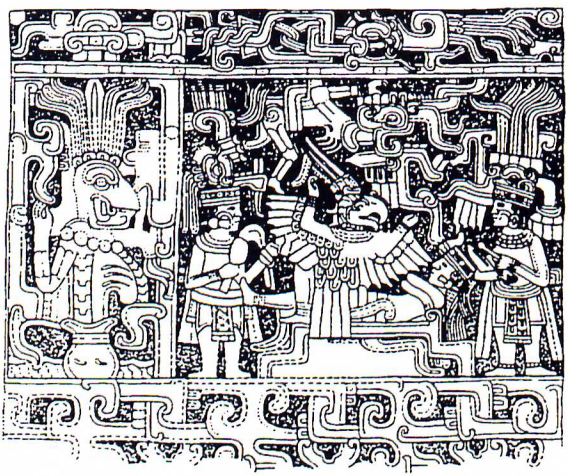


Figure 10.13 South Ballcourt Panel 2 from El Tajin after Kampen 1972.

Pyramid of the Niches Panel 5 shows two step-fret toponyms with different interior signs; their relative importance suggested by scale. Glyph Y, like other toponyms at El Tajin, is two-tiered. Its main sign is a crested wave or curl oriented to the right. We see a similar toponymic hieroglyph on the tall tripod legs of a clay vessel (now in a private collection) thought to originate from El Tajin (Zengel 1968: Figure 73). A human figure with large ear flares and an elaborate headdress stands atop the form. Although in this example the platform is three-tiered, the main sign is the same.

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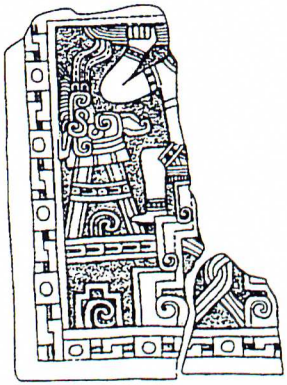

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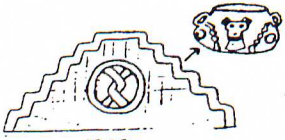

10.15a

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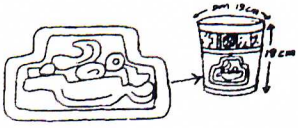


10.15d

10.15e

Figure 10.15 Toponymic style forms on ceramic vessels and palmas. 10.15a Late Classic polychrome vase from Honduras, 10.15b Motif from Veracruz bowl, 10.15c sign on a palma base published in Spinden (1928). Vessel from the Chalchuapa region, Santa Ana, El Salvador (Late Classic period).10.15e Symbol on palma base. Drawings by Cherra Wyllie.

Sara Ladron de Guevara (1992) and others connect the twist tie sign with the later Aztec *Ollin*, symbolizing movement, and associated with earthquakes, as well as the last great epoch of Aztec Creation. Based on visual similiarity we can just as easily relate the twist tie symbol to the Maya glyph T-551, T-664, or the Maya Haab month *Poph*. Among the Maya these twisted bands represent a woven mat related to the throne. It is the mat of rulership.

Although Maya examples visually conform more closely than the later Aztec symbol, one easily sees pitfalls to this mix-and-match approach. Clearly, origins of this sign may have had an altogether different association in language, culture, and symbol use at El Tajin.

Insignia on shields and copal bags offers iconographic correspondences within the context of the culture itself. For example, the twist tie sign appears as the central motif of a copal bag depicted on Altar 184, Building 4 at Tajin, on North Ballcourt Panel 4, North Ballcourt Panel 6, and on scenes from the Mound of the Building Columns relief

carvings. Copal bags don several other symbols including one on tablero reliefs from the El Tajin Arroyo Plaza (now in the site's museum). This sign has such an undeniably "glyphic" appearance that Munro Edmonson refers to it as "Huastec day sign D" (Edmonson 1988). There is no indication whatsoever in this context that the signs on copal bags are calendric. The sign does bear a slight resemblance to the Maya day sign *Ben*—and even if we stretch that point, the best we can assume is that the visual symbols derive from a common pictorial prototype. What I think is safer to assume is that they are symbols of group identity: ethnic groups, noble families, polities, or knightly orders.

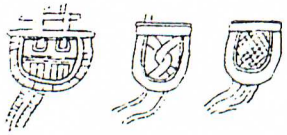


Figure 10.16 Emblems of copal bags at El Tajin.

The idea of copal bags as symbols of ethnic identity is further supported by another object carried by the figure from the Arroyo Plaza relief (see also Kampen 1972: Figure 18a-f)—a tall staff topped with a feathered fan. During Aztec times distinguished foreign visitors received or held fans of this type (Berdan and Anawalt 1997:207). We see merchants on spy missions, or travelers spanning great distances carrying round feather-topped fans in Central Mexican pictorial manuscripts including the Codex Mendoza, Codex Borgia, Codex Laud, and Codex Fejervary-Mayer (ibid). The Arroyo Group carving is in a style generally alien to Tajin, the figure carrying copal bag and fan-topped staff, rendered fully frontal. There is only one other important sculpture at El Tajin rendered in a similar manner. Kampen calls this a "Mayoid stela" (1972:8-9), and certainly the sculpted form breaks free of the material, verging on sculpture in the round. It resembles Copan stela or the Maya sculpture of Tonina more than the typical Classic

Veracruz style exemplified at Tajin, a point not lost on either Kampen (Figure 17a) or Proskouriakoff. This figure also carries a copal bag, but the symbols on the front of it are too worn to read. We find connections with a journey from somewhere distant in the tall stone to the left, depicting a man carrying a backpack. There is one other carving showing a figure carrying a staff with one of these rounded fans: a figure in ballgame costume on a sculpture now located in the Musuem of Anthropology in Jalapa.

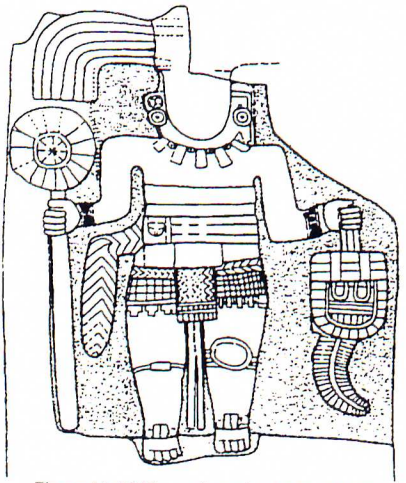


Figure 10.17 Figure from the Arroyo Plaza

Figure 10.18

A copal bag on a relief from the Mound of the Building Columns shows a cross-hatched motif. Hieroglyphs with cross-hatched main signs are very common in hieroglyphic text from Pabellon Molded-carved bowls; in one instance (from Uaxactun) appearing with a numeral coefficient. The Maya phonetic symbol *pa* also consists of a cross-hatched symbol both in Classic Maya form (Harris and Stearns 1997:33, after Schele and Looper 1996a) and in the corpus of syllabic signs from Chichen Itza compiled by John Harris. However, I suspect that there is no important correspondence in meaning.

In relief carving, cross hatching is an efficient way to show darkened forms, possibly black. One of the narrative scenes found on Rio Blanco bowls depicts several figures carrying copal bags, but in this case with the darkened pattern formed by a small checkered pattern rather than by cross-hatching (see: von Winning and Gutierrez Solana 1996:83-85). Large depressions carved into the stone would have served the same purpose, but might have been more ambiguous, if the image meant to convey *darkness* or *night*, for example. Tajin reliefs do show copal bags lacking interior motifs—in scenes from the Mound of the Building Columns and on the Structure 4 Panel. It isn't clear whether either of these were originally painted or otherwise decorated.

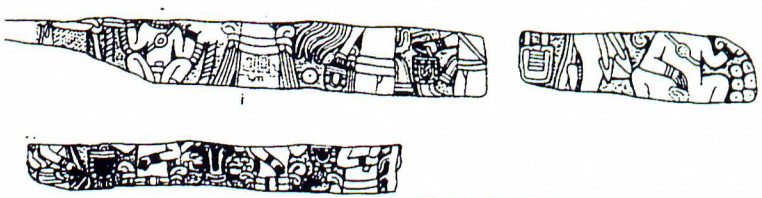


Figure 10.19 Figures carrying copal bags with insignia on column fragment from El Tajin. Drawings by Kampen 1972.

Crests adorning the shields of warriors offer still another set of insignia possibly associated with group affiliation. As we might expect, the Tajin twist tie sign features prominently on these shields; another indication that this is the El Tajin place name. These symbols also appear attached to *yokes* worn by several of the ballplayers in relief on the South Ballcourt panels.

Crested shields form part of ornate interlacing borders. Centered between crossed arrows they fashion a formidable symbolic challenge—a nearly universal semiotic convention pairing a circle with a diagonal—be it skull and crossbones or the international *ban*—all signify a warning. Shield and arrows form the Aztec metaphoric symbol for war (Berdan and Anawalt 1997:148). Shields and their insignia are part of the

extravagant regalia of soldiers and knightly elites. We identify these warriors, their origins and affiliation, by costume elements: masks, headdresses, breast plates, or animal disguises. Their shields set them apart in battle, and aid the viewer in reading the visual narrative. In the Postclassic period, Huaxtecs carried the *cuexyo chimalli,* a feathered shield decorated with U-shaped *yacametztli* nose ornaments, symbol of the Huaxtec region and motif associated with the pulque god (Berdan and Analwalt 1997:175). A slight variation of this was carried by Otomi warriors (Berdan and Anawalt 1997:189).

Shield insignia may have symbolized military rank rather than group identity. For example, during the course of his military career an Aztec warrior frequently wore several different costumes depending on the number of captives he captured in battle (see Berdan and Analwalt 1997:134-135).

On the south column from the Mound of the Building Columns we have a two-tiered step-fret altar; its main sign identified by two wavy crossed bands. Unlike the twist tie symbols, the diagonally crossed bands are not interwoven; an uneven band moves from upper left to lower right, crossing a diagonal band slanting in the opposite direction. The National Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Mexico City has two vessels with similar crossed-bands: one from the Central Gulf Coast, the other a carved-relief Blackware vase from Teotihuacan III. Notice that, in the case of the latter, the toponym is somewhat rounded in form, although it still generally resembles a step-fret pyramid or altar. Also recall that the main sign of this toponym forms the interior of one of the square cartouche day signs found on the Piedras Gordas palma from El Salvador.

Stretched horizontally atop the toponym on the Mound of the Building Columns is a sacrificial victim, a twisted umbilical chord ascending like a sapling from his prostrate form. Scenes of sacrifice used in conjunction with toponyms may actually indicate places conquered by Tajin lords—a suggestion made to me by my husband, who characterized this observation as "blindingly obvious."

Blindingly obvious. Seen in this light a new range of possible toponyms emerges, not all in step-fret form. On the South Ballcourt Panel 6 we see a victim sprawled across a temple with water symbolized below his supine form. Stylized maguey plants to the left may offer a further clue to an actual or mythical location. Still other sacrifices take place on Sculpture 5 from the Building of the Columns (south column). In fact, there are several sacrificial scenes depicted on the Mound of the Building Columns, but in a number of examples images below the figures are too worn to identify.

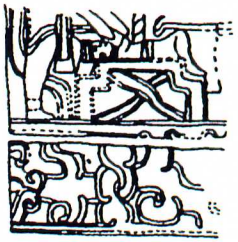


Figure 10.20 Sacrificial victim atop a step fret altar. Sara Ladron de Guevara.

Relief carvings from the Mound of the Building Columns employ use of schematic altars, temples, and trees. These devices identify locations of conquests by Tajin ruler 13 Rabbit, who features prominently in the structure's pictorial program. This interpretation is somewhat consistent with previous descriptions of actions conveyed on these pillars, identifying the El Tajin ruler and his prestigious captives. Conventions also

conform to later depictions of imperial expansion elsewhere in ancient Mesoamerica, seen on the Tizoc Stone, for example. As on the Aztec commemorative monument, the Mound of the Building Columns names conquered polities. The record of 13 Rabbit's dominion over named persons and places thus places these scenes within an historic context.

In addition to geographic or political territory, place names might identify ethnic groups or even architecture within Tajin itself. The site reveals two especially compelling examples. We see the first represented by a glyph or symbol placed within the sloping wall of a ballcourt, seen in profile. This depiction comes from the North Ballcourt reliefs (see Figure 10.10e). Its interior sign is similar to a symbol on the throne supporting a figure on the North Ballcourt Panel 5. The second example comes from the Building Column Sculpture 4. This shows a platform pyramid intersected by a central staircase. Separate design motifs occur on the temple walls located on either side of the stairs. On the left are crossed bands, like the symbol on the toponymic altar on Building Columns Sculpture 5. On the right, the building is decorated with a pattern of smaller step-fret temples. The contrasting motifs bring to mind the twin pyramid complexes of the later Aztecs—each half devoted to a separate deity. On the Mound of the Building Columns the building (or someone in it) speaks or sings, conveyed by the cartoon-like speech scroll emanating from the lower right hand side of the structure.

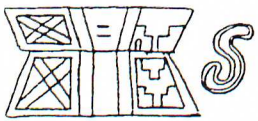


Figure 10. 21 "Singing temple" from the Building of the Columns.

The practice of incorporating text within pictorial program complicates the process of dissecting text from image. Because of this, locations have been the subject of wide ranging interpretations. Some see interactions between foes and allies; others as competing ball teams within a sort of New World Olympus. Scenes on relief carvings take place within El Tajin's own structures (Koontz 1994), in far away Teotihuacan, or in a Mayanesque mythological underworld (Wilkerson 1986), depending on who deciphers the pictorial narrative. Certainly the identity of these places deserves further attention. For my part, I am confident that step-fret forms identify key locations. This standard of depiction has time-depth and wide-scale distribution in ancient Mesoamerica.

During the course of my research I amassed several examples of step-fret toponyms within the same area of distribution as the square cartouche day signs discussed in the previous chapter. Herbert J, Spinden (1928:168, Plate XXXI.) published an image of one such toponym from a Veracruz palma of unknown provenience (Figure 10.15). Carved on the ballgame stone twin figures wearing what appear to be Ehecatl masks swallow conjoined double-headed serpents from their vantage on the upper step of a three-tiered altar or pyramid. Symbols within the frame of the toponym look like zoomorphs or perhaps flowers. The design is highly ornate, in any case.

There is another step-fret sign on a Rio Blanco bowl located in Berlin's Staatliche Museum (Figure 10.15). Toponyms of this type are rare on Rio Blanco bowls. Like the Izapan place indicators discussed above, the Rio Blanco example is anthropomorphic—a feature it shares with place signs supporting depictions of rulers at Cerro de las Mesas. Recall that Cerro de las Mesas is in the same region as Rio Blanco. In southern Veracruz the place signs do not only *enclose* beings, the signs *depict* beings.

Trusting the Epi-Classic date assigned to Rio Blanco pottery suggests that step-fret toponyms were used contemporaneously in both north-central and southern Veracruz—at El Tajin and in the Mixtequilla, respectively. This is a temporal phenomenon. Throughout Veracruz, step-fret toponyms were eventually replaced by Mixteca-Puebla hill signs. By the time of the Conquest the Huastecs and Totonacs inhabiting the Gulf Coast shared a largely pictorial semasiographic system with their Aztec overlords and adversaries. But at the time spanning the fall of Classic cities and the full scale adoption of Mixteca-Puebla style, another earlier semiotic transition appears to have taken place; its defining characteristic an eclectic "internationalism" (discussed at greater length in Chapter 7). While several new writing systems appear on the scene, seemingly out of nowhere, a surprising number of Epiclassic cultures adopted Zapotec-style toponyms. In Central Mexico, for example, step-fret place signs at Xochicalco replace the rounded hill signs and richly flowering plants of Teotihuacan—a convention that stays dormant in that region of Mexico for hundreds of years. Certainly, we are not surprised to see Zapotec-style place signs as part of the Nuine system in the Mixteca Baja.

It is the Maya, of all people in Mesoamerica, who remain the most resistant to changes in writing and symbolic communication. Their writing was undoubtedly efficient and withstood trends and tides elsewhere. They retain their hieroglyphic writing system when other Mesoamerican writing systems seem to have fully or partially disappeared. They never adopt Mixteca-Puebla style. Yet occasionally the conservative, semi-self-contained Maya adopted signs, symbols, and even hieroglyphs from prestigious distant civilizations. During certain periods of its history, Teotihuacan held this symbolic cache

for the ancient Maya. In the previous chapter we examined the adoption of Veracruz-style square cartouche day signs by Maya during the Terminal Classic period. We can imagine that these, too, held a certain prestige. And I think that it was slightly earlier, at the onset of the Classic Maya collapse, in the pulsating and rather extravagant flash signifying the beginning of the end, that the Maya, too, began naming distant places in the distant symbolic language of the outsiders themselves.

Within the realm of the ancient Maya, step-fret toponyms appear on ceramics from various locations. A Late Classic polychrome vase from Honduras (Cavatrunci, Orefici, and Terenzi 1992:109)(Figure 10.15) is unique in that the familiar Tajin twist-tie sign placed in a round cartouche forms the central motif in a six-tiered pyramidal design. The same twist-tie glyph appears in a glyph band of non-Maya symbols just below the rim of a vase from the Chalchuapa region, Santa Ana, El Salvador (von Zabern 1994:473) dated to C.E. 600-900 (Figure 10.15). Below the glyph band there is a step-fret cartouche with a zoomorphic figure enclosed within its form. The vase is from the same general area of El Salvador as the palma with the square-cartouche calendric signs discussed in the previous chapter—examples of changing characteristics in hieroglyphic writing found in proliferation at Seibal.

Step-fret designs are a common motif on Mesoamerican ceramics. In many examples I came across they were simply that: decorative designs. In certain other instances, like the two vessels described above, the combination of elements suggests we interpret them as functioning glyphs.

Two further examples of possible toponyms come from stelae. In both, the step-fret form is devoid of a base or ground-line; it becomes a sort of register or platform

separating images or actions above and below. A stela from Sacatepequez, Guatemala has a three-tiered step-fret motif in the upper quarter of its 102 vertical centimeters. The surface of the platform seems to emanate a fan of light. Three groups of circular shapes placed directly on the summit—two identical eye-shaped forms flanking a centrally placed series of pyramid-stacked circles—give the form the appearance of an animated open maw. The larger series of elements below the stepped register may also be the upper face of an unidentified creature. Yet the forms and elements are evasive—so perhaps I am only offering a Rorschach-blot interpretation.

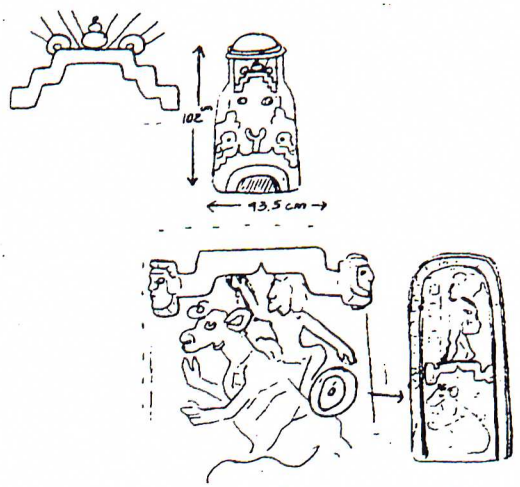


Figure 10.22 Step fret designs on Terminal Classic Maya stelae from Yucatan.

Images on another stela—this one from Yucatan—are not nearly so nebulous. Here a ruler, rendered in profile, moves across a stepped platform with two heads protruding from either end of its base. Below the register is its identifying image—a large bovine-looking creature ridden rodeo-style by a human. The man's stance indicates that he is clearly trying to maintain his balance on the back of this strange, writhing animal who must be moving up on its haunches or hind legs. The figure crouches like a surfer,

his center of gravity low, arms outstretched to anticipate any sudden shift by the creature below. The step-fret upper enclosure and animal image below possibly connects it to Acanceh, also in Yucatan.

Step-fret place names are not plentiful in the Maya lowlands. They appear in the Frieze of the Palace Stuccoes at Acanceh, in Yucatan. The palace frieze at Acanceh is a massive wall of step-fret enclosures, each containing a different animal. Two rows of these sides span the wall, framed from above by a repetition of conch shells, and by a band of alternating *po* and twist-tie symbols in the register below. Virginia Miller (1991) writes—

> "The use of this inverted T-shape on a monumental scale seems to be unique in Maya art (30).....The inverted T-shaped cartouche recalls the symbols for mountain or cave used throughout Mesoamerica. The Zapotec toponym, for example" (31).

Miller dates these reliefs to the Epi-Classic period--

> "The eclectic nature of the façade can be compared to the architectural reliefs of Xochicalco and the murals of Cacaxtla, works dating from approximately the same time as Acanceh, or slightly later (56)....By this time [9.13.0.0.0.] central Mexican elements are so often transformed or assimilated that it is impossible to determine their original source or means of transmission, although they must have passed through cultural filters like the Gulf Coast area to reach their final destination."(57)

Karl Taube sees the Acanceh stucco frieze as an Early Classic example of Teotihuacan writing. Talking with archaeologists working at Acanceh, I am more inclined to accept Miller's later dating of the site—placing well after the fall of Teotihuacan. Yet, I wholeheartedly agree with Taube (1999:26) when he says—

> "the series of figures appearing on the Acanceh mountain signs are apparently toponymic references to particular places or town; in other words, they are massive glyphs."

Why are so many topoyms gathered on the palace wall? Miller (1991:52) offers one possible explanation—

> "Since animal and bird surnames were common among the Maya at the time of the Conquest [Roys 1940] and still function among the Lacandon (Tozzer 1907:40-42), the figures could conceivably represent patronymics or heraldic crests."

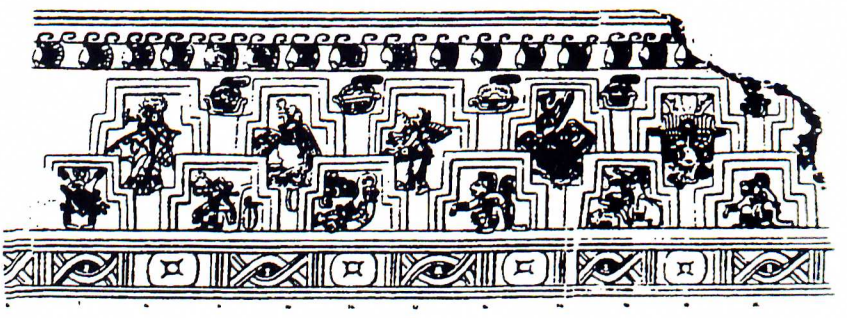


Figure 10.23 Palace frieze from Acanceh.

Animals and birds also feature prominently in headdress designs on Late Classic Remojadas figures from southern Veracruz. The practice of placing symbols of personal or group identity on head gear has a long tradition in this part of Mexico. In ancient Formative Period Veracruz and Tabasco distinct symbols adorn the helmets worn by Olmec rulers depicted on monumental stone heads that may relate to family lineage (Miller 1996: 20-21). In other parts of Mesoamerica, Karl Taube (15) suggests that variable symbols found on the tasseled headdresses of figures from Techinantitla at Teotihuacan may signify personal names. Glyphs also appear in headdresses of Classic Maya rulers (ibid [Houston and Stuart 1998:83; Kelley 1982]).

Remojadas figures accompanied the deceased. Their presence in burial contexts probably connected the dead with his or her family, and may account for why so many of these artifacts appear in pristine condition on the art market. The various motifs include several tropical birds, monkeys, an angular variety of the twist-tie symbol, knots, *grecas*, cresting waves (or curling tails), and any number or geometric or complex figure-ground designs. Glyphic-looking symbols also decorate collars, loincloths, and chest bands of these or similar figures.

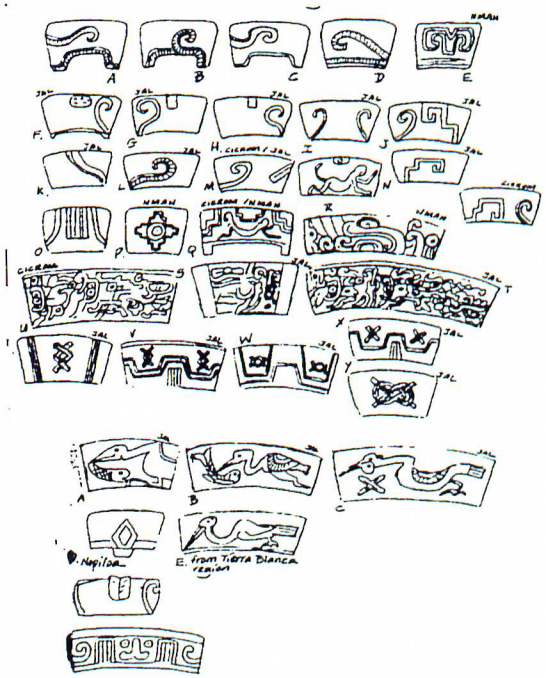


Figure 10.24 Symbols on headdress of Remojadas figures. Cherra Wyllie

The presence of Remojadas heraldic animals, birds, and symbols suggests that group identity in Veracruz had common elements with step-fret symbols of peoples and places at Acanceh. But is there any connection? Just how widespread an area do Acanceh

toponyms represent? Certainly their step-fret form does not necessarily link them directly with similar toponyms at El Tajin, since as we noted earlier, the practice of using this form of place name appears to have been widespread during the Epi-Classic. Moreover, the step-fret enclosures at Acanceh seem to be an anomaly within the realm of the ancient Maya. We don't find them at Seibal or Altar de Sacrificios or other Late-Terminal Classic Maya sites with "foreign" iconography.

I had hoped that the presence of Pabellon Molded-carved pottery might serve to link the Acanceh stucco friezes with a ceramic sphere incorporating what I believe are Veracruz influences. This did not turn out to be the case. According to Beatriz Quintal Suarte, INAH archaeologist in charge of current Acanceh excavations, there *are no* Pabellon Molded-carved ceramics at Acanceh (Quintal Suarte: personal communications).

There *is,* however, an enigmatic link between Acanceh pictography and the hieroglyphic text (containing square-cartouche day signs) on the palma from El Salvador. Recall that the Acanceh frieze is framed from above by a repeating pattern of inverted conch shells, and from below by a register containing alternating twist-tie signs and *po* symbols. Both of these signs occur as hieroglyphs on the text from the Salvador palma. The glyphs are in close succession. Taken separately neither symbol is remarkable. *Po* is a sign in the Classic Maya syllabery, and depicts the cushion placed over the ruler's throne (Loundsbury). The Maya syllabic sign *lu* consists of a conch shell, although in this case the syllabic sign does not resemble the motif on the upper portion of the stucco frieze.

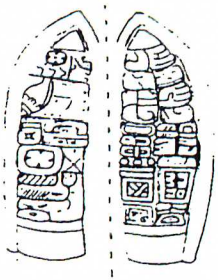


Figure 10.25 Palma from Piedras Gordas.

The conch shell has other roots, most notably as a Teotihuacan symbol of abundance. We see shells, including conch, featured on the talud-tablero façade of the Temple of the Feathered Serpent at Teotihuacan. This association is significant, I believe, for several reasons. First, the Feathered Serpent is a deity of Veracruz origins. Marine shell iconography refers to the coast—in all likelihood the Gulf Coast, offering a rich supply of natural resources exploited by Teotihuacan's vast trade empire (an idea explored more fully in Chapter 14).

Yet, despite iconography shared with Teotihuacan, dates associated with both the Acanceh palace frieze and Salvador palma place both to well after the fall of that city. Moreover, the ballgame-associated palma and square-cartouche day sign each connect the latter object with Veracruz. Therefore, I am inclined to think that the conch shell is an icon associated with trade in its decorative context. Given its scale within the hieroglyphic inscription on the Salvador palma, we might entertain the idea that here the shell is a logograph rather than phonetic *lu*.

Following the trail of named and alluded-to locations associated with Veracruz frequently leads to vast areas of trackless landscape. The symbols simply disappear, or are transformed so as to be unrecognizable. As I mention earlier in this chapter, sometime during the Postclassic period inhabitants of the Gulf Coast and their neighbors adopt new methods of rendering place names (or in some cases, like the Teotihuacan hill sign, reviving antiquated ones).

Roughly coeval with these new conventions, the place names themselves change. When and how this transformation occurs is unclear. What we do know is that the Aztec Codex Mendoza lists six provincial regions in and surrounding the Gulf Coast: Tochtepec, Quautochco, Cuetlaxtlan, Tlatlauhquitepec, Tuchpa, and Tzicoac comprised predominantly of Huastec, Totonac, Chinantec, and Mazatec speakers. Names of many of these provinces and towns are in Nahuat'l, the spoken language of the ancient Mexica or Aztecs. The Codex Mendoza lists fifty-eight towns from these six regions on its tribute lists. Toponyms appear for each town listed.

I imagined that despite change in toponymic conventions, the main sign might remain the same. If this were so, I would find visual correspondences between symbols on toponyms at El Tajin and one or more of those listed in the Codex Mendoza. I found none.

Next, I looked at toponyms from three Native documents produced in Veracruz: the Tuxpan Lienzos (copies made in 1492, 1499, and 1875), Misantla Codex (1572), and the Coacatzintla (1554-56). Jose Luis Melgarejo (Melgarejo Vivanco 1970) identifies place names from the Tuxpan Lienzos with known locations in the Tuxpan, Papantla, and Chicontepec areas of the Gulf Coast. Here again I found no obvious

correspondences. Melgarejo identifies El Tajin with Mictlan within the municipality of Papantla. The Mictlan toponym bears no resemblance to the twist tie sign presumed to symbolize El Tajin during the Late Classic Period. Mictlan, a Nahuat'l term, means Place of the Dead, and skeletal deities certainly preside over many important scenes carved within Tajin's architectural sculpture. Perhaps to later inhabitants of north Central Veracruz, the abandoned city was indeed a place of the dead, just as long after the Classic collapse the Aztecs revered the Place Where the Gods Reside or Teotihuacan.

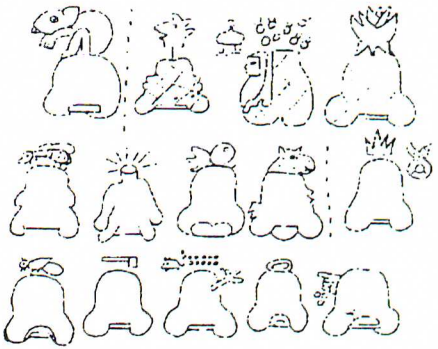


Figure 10.26 Veracruz place names from Postclassic and Contact period documents.

Chapter Eleven
A Miscellany of Additional Classic Veracruz Hieroglyphs

The nature of hieroglyphic text changes in Veracruz, as elsewhere, after the Classic fall. We no longer see stelae erected, like those at Cerro de las Mesas, with their Long Count dates, sequential columnar text, and ruler portraits. We will never know whether scribes continued producing these longer texts in bark paper books, as they did in the Maya area. But just as in the Maya area, writing on monumental art undergoes a radical transformation. Written information becomes abbreviated.

In the preceding chapters we looked at Late to Terminal Classic conventions for names, dates, and toponyms-- examining precedents for these conventions from within Veracruz and beyond the Gulf Coast. In this chapter I cover other aspects of Classic Veracruz hieroglyphic writing not dealt with in the previous two chapters: synesthetic signs, linear texts, and assorted miscellaneous logograms

Speech Scrolls

Phonetic writing encodes the sound of spoken language. Speech scrolls, on the other hand, suggest to us what sound *looks like*; they visually approximate sound rather than encoding it (as does musical notation, for example). As symbols they are both semiotic, insofar as they are part of a system of visual signage, and synesthetic—they use one sense (in this case vision) to describe or imitate another (sound). We are all familiar with synesthetic signs from popular comic books. The late American pop artist Roy Lichtenstein (1923-1997) drew on this form in his large-scale panels. Lichtenstein's

examples demonstrate how the sign produces the sensation of sound with and without accompanying text.

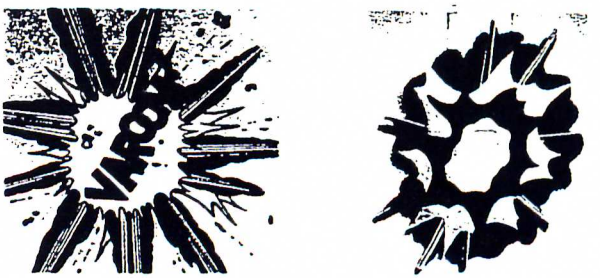


Figure 11.1 *Varoom* (1965), and *Explosion I* (1965). Roy Lichtenstein

In addition to providing sound with properties of color and form, synesthetic signs frequently indicate the origin and direction of sound. Obviously, the sound of the human voice resonates from its speaker. In texts we bracket spoken words in quotation marks, while in image, cartoon bubbles "show" us the utterance of words or the "sound" of interior thoughts.

Figure 11.2 Sound made visible. New Yorker cartoon by Saul Steinberg.

Ancient scribal artists used visual devices indicating the origin and direction of speech. In ancient Egypt, for example, as we noted earlier, the viewer "reads into" profiled forms and faces of hieroglyphic characters.

Mesoamerican artists made use of speech scrolls. As noted in Chapter 7, this visual device apparently originated in Teotihuacan, where use of speech scrolls is pervasive. Evidence suggests that Classic Veracruz artists adopted speech scrolls through Teotihuacan contact or influence. Speech scrolls show up later on the Gulf Coast than in Central Mexico. Perhaps this is because, as in the Maya area, Epi-Olmec logo-phonetic writing rendered these signs largely redundant.

Speech scrolls often record *the occurrence of speech* rather than the precise words issued by the speaker. Signs are varied, illustrating the diverse spirit, tone, emotion, or authority encapsulated in the action of speech or the intent of the speaker. In addition to offering visual form to auditory phenomena, speech scrolls serve as hieroglyphic symbols of political authority. Among the Aztecs, the ruler in charge of external affairs was known as the *Tlatoani* or "the Speaker."

While speech scrolls identify authority invested in royal leaders, they are by no means exclusively used in this context. At El Tajin speech scrolls occur most frequently in scenes from the South Ballcourt friezes and on the Mound of the Building Columns (Kampen 1972:30). Perhaps the most famous example is of two ballplayers facing one another. They are apparently from opposing teams, conversation or negotiations transpiring between these men made evident by speech scrolls directly in front of their faces. They speak one to each other, scrolls touching.

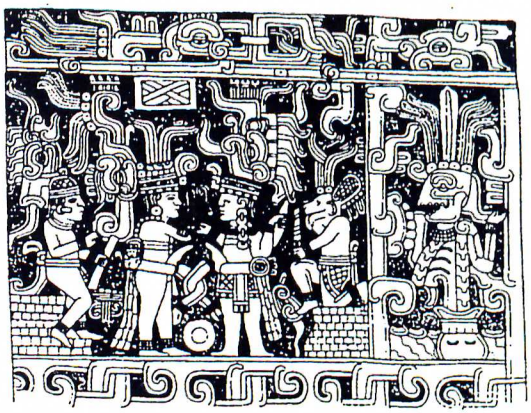


Figure 11.4 Speech scrolls on El Tajin South Ballcourt panel . Kampen 1972.

On carvings from the Mound of the Building Columns we see several characters issuing S-shaped speech scrolls, as well as a plumed coyote whose speech scroll has pointed, blade-like appendages. Speech scrolls on the building columns reinforce the pictorial narrative, suggesting a succession of intense action and interaction.

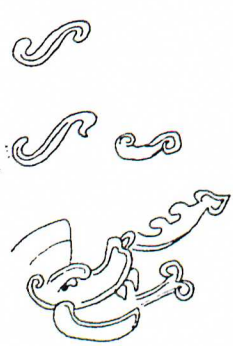


Figure 11.5a

Figure 11.5b

Figure 11.5 Examples of speech scrolls from El Tajin.

The ballplayer figure on Tajin Sculpture 2 issues what appear to be a series of thoughts, illustrated by four J-shaped scrolls protruding from his mouth—each emanating

from the preceding one. Recall from the previous chapter that the protagonist carries a rounded fan attached to a staff, suggesting that he is a foreign visitor, long distance trader, or diplomat of some kind.

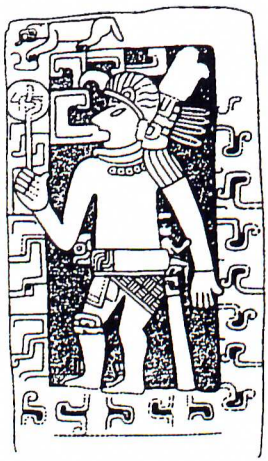


Figure 11.6 El Tajin Sculpture 2 with J-shaped scrolls. Drawing by Kampen 1972.

An example of the relationship of speech scrolls to hieroglyphic texts occurs in a sculpture fragment from the Mound of the Building Columns. A left-facing figure in the center of the fragment issues an S-shaped speech scroll that presses against a rounded enclosure encircling the Tajin twist tie symbol. There is another sign placed directly below it, indicating that the man is expressing a series of words or sequential ideas. Hieroglyphic text on the right-hand side of the fragment (discussed more fully below) reinforces the idea of expressive words, thoughts, or ideas.

Taube discusses the relationship of speech scrolls to written hieroglyphic text in his article on writing at Teotihuacan. Examining stacked pictorial symbols from the rear of a slate mirror back, the text (discussed below) terminates in a speech scroll. Taube (1999:34) writes—

> "This glyphic element is probably a quotative particle, denoting the act of uttering the previous phrase. Stephen Houston (personal communication 1999) notes a similar convention in Classic Maya epigraphy, where certain clauses terminate with the nominalized antipassive Mayan phrase *yalahiya*, or "it is his saying." "

Narrative scenes on molded-carved Fine Orange wares from the Mixtequilla-Tuxtlas region of Veracruz lack speech scrolls. This absence is incongruent considering scenes of interactions between human or supernatural agents taking place on many of the bowls and vases. Yet this absence follows southern Veracruz prototypes found on Epi-Olmec and Cerro de las Mesas stelae.

In the Maya area, on the other hand, speech scrolls occur on Pabellon Molded-carved wares. An example of this is the three-pedaled flower emerging from the mouth of several of the semi-reclining figures found on Pabellon Molded-carved bowls. Figures on these bowls are solitary, occupying a panel generally framed on either side by wide vertical glyph bands. They are not in conversation, per se. The blossoming speech therefore symbolizes authority of the speaker, rather than the sound of the human voice. The flowery shape indicates that the figure occupying these bowls is a ruler. The Maya word for ruler is *ahaw*. The twentieth day sign in the Maya *Tzolk'in* or sacred 260-day count is *Ahaw*, sharing the same interior sign as *nik*, the Classic Maya hieroglyphic symbol for flower. Mayan epigrapher David Stuart notes the important metaphoric association of Maya rulers with flowers.

The connection may have been a pan-Mesoamerican concept. The ruling Aztec *Huei Tlatoani* or "Great Speaker" performed formal discourse known as "Flowery Speech." The Aztec *Tlatoani* waged battles for human sacrificial victims, known as "flowery wars." Conversely, poetry went by the Nahuatl term *in xochitl, in cuicatl* ("flower, song"), and at least one well-known ruler wrote this type of verse.

The figure portrayed on so many of the Pabellon Molded-carved bowls emits "flowery speech." The atalat'l he holds connects his flowery words to warfare. His supine posture tells us that he is confident and cool.

Figure 11.7 Figure on Pabellon Molded-carved vessel. Cherra Wyllie.

Seibal monumental sculpture dispels any doubts that these reclining figures are lords. The figure on Seibal Stela 13 emits a speech scroll with jeweled elements affixed to its upper surface. The rounded jewels are probably jade, like his enormous bead necklace, symbolizing "precious speech." His hairdo and costume identify him as one of the reclining figures frequently appearing on Pabellon Molded-carved bowls. He wears a snaked belt around his waist and seven serpents descend from both his loincloth and the rear of his lower costume. The seven serpents bring to mind Central Veracruz serpent iconography, as well as costumes worn by hollow clay figures from Nopiloa. The text in the register above him contains a square-cartouche day sign. On Seibal Stela 19 jeweled speech also accompanies a standing figure wearing an Ehecatl mask. He scatters seeds or droplets, which, along with his precious speech, indicates his position as a ruling lord. The Ehecatl *buccal* mask, like costume elements on Stela 13, references connections to Veracruz beliefs and symbolism (see Chapter 14).

Figure 11.8 Seibal ST 13 showing jeweled speech.

Linear Text

After the Classic fall there is an unexplained absence of linear text in ancient Veracruz. Even at Cerro de las Mesas, carved stelae with textual columns disappear in favor of single or paired square-cartouche calendric signs serving as isolated captions to pictorial scenes. Does this transition signify a change in the type of writing or the ethnicity of the players involved? It is difficult to know. At Maya sites to the southeast the nature of texts undergoes a major transformation, while the writing itself remains largely the same.

Apart from paired day signs, I found only five examples of what I believe are linear texts from Late or Terminal Classic Veracruz. I mention two above, in my discussion of speech scrolls. I appropriate one from Karl Taube's (1999) published examples of Teotihuacan writing. The other originates on a fragment from the Mound of the Building Columns at El Tajin.

Herbert Spinden first published a photograph of the Mound of the Building Columns fragment in 1933 (PL 17b). Kampen reproduced it in his catalogue of El Tajin

sculpture (Figure 35b). The fragment shows sections of two, possibly three, groups of hieroglyphic symbols arranged in vertical sequence. On the far left of the fragment we have a human figure situated over horizontally placed dots and a bar—the number eight. This is one of our examples of personal names. A frame encloses the hieroglyph to the right and beneath it—either enclosing the sign on all four sides like a square or rectangular cartouche, or possibly forming the end of a longer vertical register or enclosure. Abutting the partially framed name to the lower right is another hieroglyph—a stemmed triangle with three arched lines dividing its area vertically. The name sign and stemmed-triangle glyph both press against a figure on the lower left-hand side of the composition. Only a portion of his head is in view. All of these glyphic elements are segregated from the next series of hieroglyphs by a thick vertical band.

Figure 11.9 Column fragment from El Tajin with linear text. Drawing by Kampen 1972.

In the second section a figure, arms crossed, emits an S-shaped speech scroll and seems to be "speaking" the hieroglyphs on his direct left. Both signs are circular. The upper one, as noted above, has the El Tajin twist-tie symbol. The glyph below it has a small circle in its center and a series of eight dots around its perimeter. Looking at the second symbol I am reminded of the Aztec marketplace glyph (Berdan and Anawalt 1997:156) (although the latter is admittedly more ornate). As Berdan and Anawalt explain (ibid) this sign derives from round altar-like stones found in the center of Aztec marketplace enclosures—

> "Duran tells us that the god of the market "had his place upon a *momoztli,* which is like a roadside shrine or pillory block...Many of them stood along roads, on street corners, and in the market. In the shrines at the marketplaces were fixed

round carved stones as large as shields, each one bearing a round figure like that of the sun with flowers and circles carved around it" "

This sign also resembles a glyph-like symbol repeated on a lower register from one of the Las Higueras murals.

On the far right of the fragment vertical and horizontal registers clearly demarcate glyphic elements. A deer head occupies the upper frame, and a stacked bundle—symbolizing a quantity of goods of some type-- is placed in another section directly below it.

Since scenes on the Mound of the Building Columns represent war and captive-taking, as well as a processions of figures from wide-ranging areas, it is likely that linear texts from these columns refer to trade or tribute. The sequence of events is a nearly universal, historic narrative-- from the Standard of Ur in ancient Mesopotamia to Late Classic Maya Murals of Bonampak; a scenario of warfare, captive-taking, tribute.

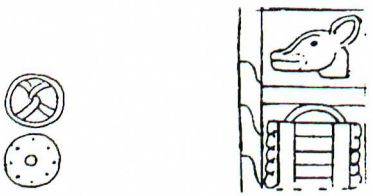


Figure 11.10 Linear texts from Building Columns fragment from El Tajin..

The subject of another linear text located on a slate mirror back also connects it with trade or tribute. While Taube (1999) equates the object with Teotihuacan, I disagree. The object, material, artistic style, and elements relate it to Classic Veracruz art, as first defined by Tatiana Proskouriakoff (1954:67).

As noted in Chapter 6, Proskouriakoff lists pyrite mirror backs among those objects with diagnostic "Classic Veracruz Style." The distribution of incised mirror backs

connects them with stone ballgame paraphernalia and former lines of Isthmian language and culture. Apart from Seibal and the Pasion region, this is the approximate distribution of square cartouche day signs. Michael Coe (1994:113) writes that Classic Veracruz style in its formative stages "can be best seen" in these circular slate mirror backs. Coe places these in the Early Classic period (ibid).

How long these objects were used and produced is uncertain. The figure in Taube's example (taken from Benson and Joralemon 1980: No. 36) shows a seated profiled figure. He wears a very Teotihuacan-style costume, adorned with scallop shells and coyote tails, yet his profiled, seated position is similar to renderings of seated figures on thrones or benches from El Tajin. Michael Kampen, writing on the basic human body poses and methods of rendering them by El Tajin artists, describes this position—

> "Seated profile characters with legs extended downward, below the supporting seat, bend both legs 90 degrees at the hip and at the knees" (Kampen 1972:29).

The style and pose relates the mirror back to El Tajin canons of style and proportion; on the other hand, no human figures from the site of Teotihuacan are rendered in this manner.

Figure 11.11 Pyrite mirror back. Taube 1999.

Individual glyphic elements also appear to relate the mirror back to El Tajin and the Veracruz Classic. The mirror back has five stacked elements: a coiled serpent, a bundle of reeds, a reclining figure, a bird partially framed from behind by a thick border

patterned with crossed diagonal lines, and a speech scroll at the base. The scroll emerges from the foot or ankle of the seated figure.

Figure 11.12 Glyphic sequence from the mirror back in 11.11 above.

Serpent, as we saw in Chapter 9, is a sign in the 260-day calendar of ancient Veracruz. It first appears on Epi-Olmec La Mojarra Stela 1. During the Late Classic period serpents appear as glyphic elements on square cartouche calendric signs on Rio Blanco bowls. In the Maya area Taube relates them to a square cartouche day sign at Jimbal (Taube 1999:55). If this were the case, the square cartouche day sign from the Maya site of Jimbal would have a clear correlate in square cartouche day signs from the Mixtequilla. However, based on my own first hand observations and drawings of the stela (as well as Merle Greene's rubbings), I am not convinced that the day sign contains a serpent.

As Taube mentions (ibid), we find the four dart sign on a column from the Temple of the Warriors at Chichen Itza. Perhaps these are the same elements held by a seated figure on Tajin South Ballcourt Panel One. The figure on the left hand side of the panel holds three or four pointed spears or arrows bunched in his hand.

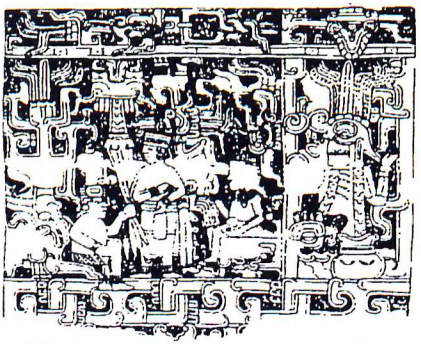


Figure 11.13 El Tajin South Ballcourt Panel 1 Note figure on the left carrying darts. Kampen 1972.

The next hieroglyph is represented by a small naked human-like figure, reclining on his back. Several figures recline on their backs in scenes from the Mound of the Building Columns and ballcourt panels. Most, if not all, are sacrificial victims. Yet, the little figure from the slate mirror back is very much alive and kicking. It is not clear whether he is a baby or a dwarf. Diminutive figures, some sharing the same "Bart Simpson hairdo" as our glyphic character, encircle the central column from the Mound of the Building Columns. Strange homunculi are prevalent in Classic Veracruz iconography--unexplained characters with strangely colored pallors of green or blue in painted murals of Tajin, Las Higueras, or even the *Bebidas* murals of distant Cholula.

The third glyphic element in the series is a bird. Birds accompany human figures on Tajin Building Columns sculpture. Actual species of birds differ from scene to scene.

Figure 11.14 Bird from Building of the Columns. Kampen 1972.

Rio Blanco bowls offer several examples of bird glyphs and related elements. A seemingly disjointed hieroglyphic bird appears on a Rio Blanco bowl now in a private

collection (von Winning and Gutierrez Solana, Figure III.4). Bird heads also appear above the heads of figures in bird costumes from other Rio Blanco bowls (von Winning and Gutierrez Solana: 50, Figures III.8, III.9 and V.3). Birds adorn the God-L-style broad-brimmed hat worn by traders (IV.11), while distinctive bird and bird heads protrude from headdresses worn by processional figures (V.1; INAH 10-211006).

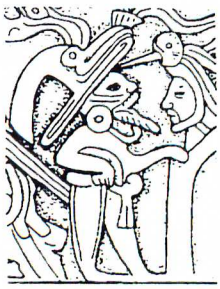


Figure 11.15 Figure on a Rio Blanco bowl in the Xalapa Museum wearing a bird headdress. C. Wyllie.

A similar bird-fronted headdress appears on a figure brandishing a weapon on a Pabellon Molded-carved bowl (K8354), as well as on the headdress of one of the reclining figures on a Pabellon bowl from Altar de Sacrificios. Both of these vessels, it should be noted, contain non-Maya hieroglyphs. The latter of two bowls contains a stylized bird head in the glyph band above the recumbent figure. We observe that birds actually *function* as hieroglyphs on Pabellon ware on scenes from a bowl now in a private collection in Guatemala. On one side of the bowl, a bird is the central element between two opposing semi-reclining figures carrying weapons. On the opposite side of the bowl there is another scene featuring two different opposing semi-reclining figures. The figure on the left offers a small bundle of tribute to the man on the right. Between the two figures, in the space occupied by the bird in the opposite panel, we have a square cartouche day sign, which reads 7 Death. The placement of the day sign and bird element

suggests that the two hieroglyphs share a similar function. In this capacity the bird glyph substitutes for the day sign.

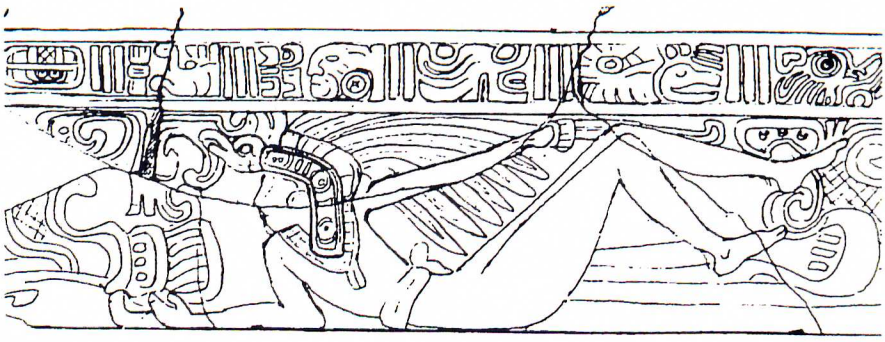


Figure 11.16 Bird front headdress on figure from Pabellon Molded-carved bowl from Altar de Sacrificios now in the National Museum of Anthropology, Guatemala. Drawing by Cherra Wyllie

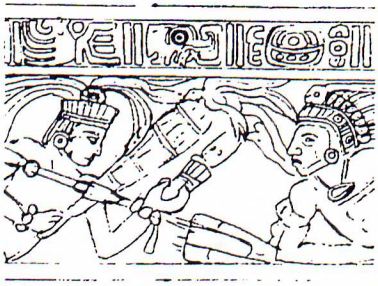


Figure 11.17 Bird glyph on Pabellon Molded-carved Fine Orange bowl. Cherra Wyllie

In northern Yucatan, birds are common symbols on toponyms from the stucco frieze at the Acanceh Palace (Miller 1991). Earl Morris (1931) identified hieroglyphic birds from the Northwest Colonnade of the Temple of the Warriors at Chichen Itza, claiming these were "name glyphs." These bird hieroglyphs also appear on a sculpted circular stone between the upper platform stairway. Further studies of patronymic birds and related non-Maya hieroglyphs at Chichen Itza have been undertaken by Charles Lincoln (1986:154), Cynthia Kristan-Graham, Linnea Wren, Ruth Krochak, Lynn Foster, and Peter Keeler. The location of bird glyphs on the Temple of the Warriors is

especially compelling since here we find other signs appearing on the mirror back linear text. These include serpents (Pillars 27 and 33 East, Kristan-Graham nd [Charlot 1931:Plate 95 and 100], and North Banqueta Figure VI [A Morris 1931:Plate 133]), four darts or lances (Pillar 19 North, Kristan-Graham nd [Charlot 1931: Plate 87]), small nude figures (although not reclining) (North Banqueta Figures IV and V, Kristan Graham, nd [A. Morris 1931: Plate 133]), as well as several species of birds. Recall that the Temple of the Warriors also has a name sign rendered in the same convention as names accompanying figures in scenes from the Mound of the Building Columns at El Tajin.

The final glyphic element in the mirror back sequence is the aforementioned speech scroll. This is probably a quotative particle, as Taube suggests, indicating that the speaker is the seated protagonist pictured on the mirror back.

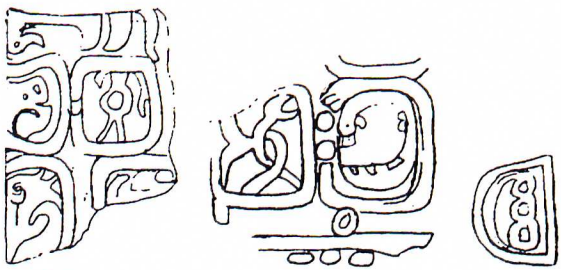
Ceramics offer further examples of sequential hieroglyphic texts, two from El Tajin, the other from La Antigua, Veracruz, a site just north of the modern city of Veracruz. El Tajin yields two fragments with partial inscriptions published by Wilfredo DuSolier (1945: 156, Laina XVII A, Figures 3,4, and 5). The sherds from excavations at the Mound of the Building Columns are Fine Relief Blackware, a variety of Rio Blanco style pottery produced from a fine textured dark clay source (see Chapter 6). Although these particular sherds received little or no attention after from their initial publication, DuSolier noted the resemblance to Maya hieroglyphs. He writes—

> "Entre los fragmentos aparecen peqeunos cuadrangulos que debido a su mal estado no se puede determinar con precision su debujo exacto, pero que parecen glifos mayas"

The first of the two ceramic fragments shows what appears to be six hieroglyphs, with only one seen in its entirety. This glyph in position B-2 looks somewhat like the

Maya *si-ya-h(a)*, the verb indicating birth. Like Maya texts, we can also imagine these paired in double columns—a structure contrasting with Mixe-Zoquean inscriptions, where we read texts in single vertical columns, regardless of the number of columns in succession.

The second El Tajin sherd has another series of hieroglyphs, with a pair of rectangular glyphs visible and possibly a bar and dot numeral placed horizontally beneath them. The hieroglyph on the right looks somewhat like the Maya day sign Cimi, meaning Death. It could easily bear no relation to Maya writing, since DuSolier himself was dubious about his ability to reproduce the worn inscriptions accurately. Also, because these are fragments, the hieroglyphic texts may be longer. As we discussed in Chapters 3, 7, and 9, shared visual properties do not necessarily connote shared meaning—the two may just look alike.



11.18 11.19 11.20

Figures 11.18-11.20 Hieroglyphs from Fine Relief Blackware sherds excavated and drawn by Wilfido DuSolier 1945 (enlarged and re-drawn by Cherra Wyllie).

The Fine Orange rim sherd from La Antigua offers a successive series of hieroglyphs in a straight vertical row outlined by thick bands above and below the text. The most prominent glyph takes the form of a rather stylized zoomorph, with a series of graphic affixes to the creature's left. Framing this sequence on either side we see paired vertically-placed bars—a devise frequently used to separate glyphs or glyphic sequences

on horizontally placed texts on Pabellon Molded-carved bowls from the Maya region. The paired bars may separate repeating elements, in which case this may not be a linear text at all. Both drawing and description make this difficult to tell.

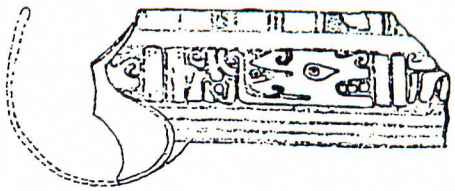


Figure 11.21 Sherd fragment with hieroglyphs from La Antigua, Veracruz.

A Melange Of Isolated Hieroglyphs

Pictorially-dominated Late Classic Veracruz relief carvings incorporate personal names, calendric signs, toponyms, and speech scrolls. Occasionally, as seen above, successive glyphic elements formed linear texts. However, what of isolated hieroglyphs which do not label persons, places, or dates?

In a system where image and text are inextricably intertwined, differentiating hieroglyphs and iconography is often difficult. Scenes on El Tajin relief carvings and Rio Blanco bowls offer several such elements.

At El Tajin, rectangular forms descend into pictorial scenes from intricate upper registers. The banner-like elements are enclosed fully or partially in a plain rectangular cartouche. We see similar hieroglyphs imbedded within the ornate borders on horizontal frieze fragments from the Pyramid of the Niches. The four examples of this latter group contain the Tajin twist tie—probably symbolizing the name of the city. On South Ballcourt Panel 5, two rectangular hieroglyphs flank a grotesque two-bodied being in the

upper frieze frame. These paired glyphs form knots of overlapping diagonal bands and a central motif of concentric circles.

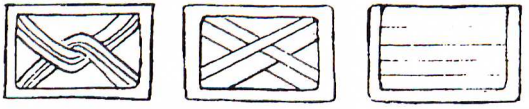


Figure 11.22 Banner like glyphs from El Tajin relief carvings.

Descending rectangular hieroglyphs occur on the South Ballcourt Panel 3, Building Columns Sculpture 1, and on South Ballcourt Panel 5. The rectangular cartouche above South Ballcourt Panel 1 has interwoven, diagonally crossed bands. The sign, like those incorporated as border elements, is oriented horizontally, unlike the vertically placed rectangular glyph or banner on South Ballcourt Panel 1. The vertical sign looks celestial, although it could be a stylized zoomorph. Finally, the glyphic rectangle on Building Columns Sculpture 1 is divided into five horizontal sections.

These signs are probably toponyms. As we noted in the previous chapter, the Tajin twist tie symbol appears repeatedly on shields, copal bags, and as the central motif in step-fret enclosures. The evenly spaced horizontal bands on the rectangular hieroglyph descending from the decorative register of Building Columns Sculpture 1 also form the central motif of a bag depicted on one of the Building Column fragments, again indicating that these are place names.

The rectangular symbols repeated on El Tajin pictorial relief resemble banners. Banners and banner-raising ceremonies feature prominently in Late Classic Veracruz iconography and ritual. Art historian Rex Koontz analyzes the political significance of this practice in his doctoral dissertation (Koontz 1994). Banner raising, according to Koontz, served as a way of consolidating group alliances "which were then legitimized

and united by their participation in the re-creation of paradigmatic war" (Koontz 1994:176). He likens this practice to analogous rituals performed by the Aztec and Maya (ibid). The location of twelve banner bases directly in front of the Pyramid of the Niches at El Tajin attests to the ritual's significance. Banners also feature prominently in the painted program of Las Higueras. Tall, aristocratic woman take part in a ritual procession carrying an assortment of colorful banners.

Certain symbols appear to link actions of characters in scenes on the South Ballcourt panels. These include: 1. twisted disembodied arms or possibly serpents forming the Tajin twist tie (South Ballcourt Panel 3) 2. a scrolled T-shaped symbol supporting five horizontally-placed circular elements (South Ballcourt Panel 3), and 3. the Mesoamerican symbol for gold (South Ballcourt Panel 4). The twist tie sign, as discussed elsewhere, separates two ballplayers emitting speech scrolls. The T-shaped sign and glyph for gold are directly in front of profiled figures, seated atop ballcourts and carrying batons. Both men wear a similar style of head gear, although other costume elements (such as helmet motif, ear flares, and collar) differ.

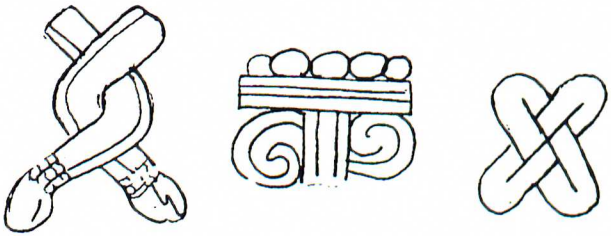


Figure 11.23 An assortment of El Tajin hieroglyphs found on the South Ballcourt panels.

Another disparate element of El Tajin art is an A-shaped scaffolding symbol. The sign occurs twice at El Tajin, on the Building of the Columns and on the Pyramid of the

Niches Panel 5, and in each case supports a zoomorphic head at its apex. In the symbol from Pyramid of the Niches Panel 5, the truncated A-shape encloses a right-facing curl at the baseline.

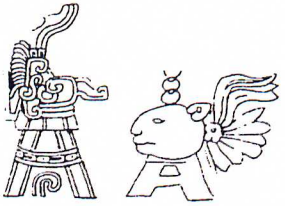


Figure 11.24 A-shaped enclosures from the Mound of the Building Columns, El Tajin.

Celestial Signs

Relief sculptures from El Tajin shares several symbolic forms with Rio Blanco bowls. Among these are celestial symbols; stars and planets descending from vertical registers layered above the picture plane. Tajin relief carvings and Rio Blanco vessels also share the presence of donut-shaped forms punctuating background space. Their presence is unexplained. Are they meaningfully-encoded, or merely a manifestation of *horror vacuii*? Likely, these interspersed concentric circles place actions within a star-studded sky, the underworld realms of night and darkness.

Star signs occur abundantly in Late Classic art throughout Mesoamerica. We find them from the mural paintings of Cacaxtla to the ancient painted tombs of Zapotec lords. At El Tajin, star-shaped Venus symbols hang from the heavenly ceiling on South Ballcourt Panel 5, and as extruded eyes dangling above scenes from the Mound of the Building Columns. Rio Blanco bowls share the Venus star sign with both El Tajin and Maltrata in Veracruz. I explore the relationship of Venus symbols with long distance merchants, on this bowl and other related scenes, in Chapter 13.

Certain Rio Blanco bowls also feature concentric U-shaped elements, which like star signs, dangle from the celestial divide. These forms resemble the Maya moon sign, which first makes it appearance in the art of Izapa during the PreClassic period, later becoming part of a standardized iconographic language (Coe 1999:64). The lunar symbols on Rio Blanco bowls assume two basic orientations: rightside up and upside down. Inverted concentric U's are placed *above* accompanying symbols. One of the personal names from the Mound of the Building Columns places a five-bar below this hieroglyph. When the U-shaped sign resumes its upright orientation, it is frequently placed *beneath* bar and dot denominators or what may be head variants. Context suggests that concentric circles topped with bar and dot numerals may also be lunar symbols—with various shapes, orientation, and numeral denominators indicating lunar phases and periods. Concentric circles and U-shaped elements are key features in the vertical and horizontal bands of Pabellon Molded-carved bowls. Are the Pabellon texts sky bands? We investigate this mystery in the next chapter: The Pabellon Enigma.

Figure 11.25 Celestial symbols on a Rio Blanco vase. Hasso Von Winning 1996.

Chapter Twelve
The Pabellon Enigma

Bands of sequential glyph-like symbols on Pabellon Molded-carved vases and bowls offer us an enticing mystery. In most cases these are not recognizably "Maya" hieroglyphs (Adams; R. E. W. Adams 1973; Graham 1971b, 1973, 1990; Sabloff 1973), yet their structure mimics the P.S.S. (Primary Standard Sequence) and S.S.S. (Secondary Standard Sequence) of Classic Maya vases (Coe 1973; Stuart 2001 and 1989). The glyph bands share several visual elements with Maya sky bands, while containing certain features—such as affixes—more common to phonetic writing than to symbols decorating celestial borders. Pabellon Molded-carved Fine Orange shares a comparable appearance, clay recipe, and mode of manufacture with Rio Blanco ceramics; yet, scenes on the vessels distinguish them from Rio Blanco wares, as do the glyph bands found only on the Pabellon ceramics. Finally, as discussed in previous chapters, hieroglyphs and iconography on Pabellon ceramics exhibit demonstrably clear Veracruz influence; however, we see this influence grafted onto Classic Maya prototypes. Pabellon-related text and image amalgamates two worlds and in doing so presents us with a number of questions. Is the end result the sum of its componential elements? How did this blend of technology, style, iconography, and symbol originate? Answers lie in an impenetrable web of social processes underlying the Classic collapse. Our objectives are more modest, yet only slightly less daunting: 1) How do we read these hieroglyphs? 2) What do they say?

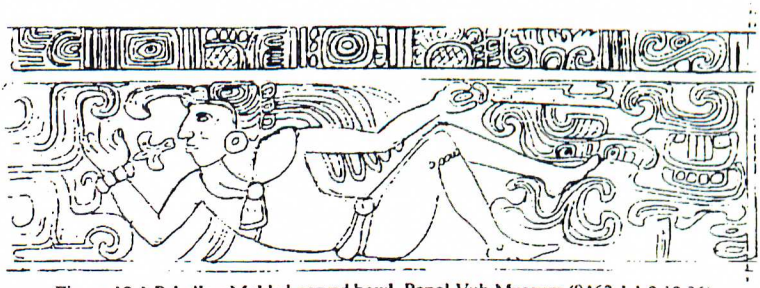


Figure 12.1 Pabellon Molded-carved bowl, Popol Vuh Museum (0462 1.1.2.12.36) Drawing by Cherra Wyllie

Layout

Just below the rim of Pabellon Molded-carved vases and bowls we frequently see a single horizontal band of hieroglyphs, wrapping entirely around the pot (Figure 12.1) Pabellon bowls often have a single vertical column of sequential hieroglyphs, as well In some instances we see one format—the presence of a horizontal or vertical glyph band—appearing on the bowl without the other. Normally, Pabellon bowls have both horizontal and vertical registers, similar in appearance to the Primary Standard Sequence (horizontal bands) and Secondary Standard Sequence (vertical bands) on Classic Maya vases. There are no examples of paired columns, as appear in Classic Maya hieroglyphic text, although on Classic Maya vases the PSS consists of a single horizontal column of hieroglyphs

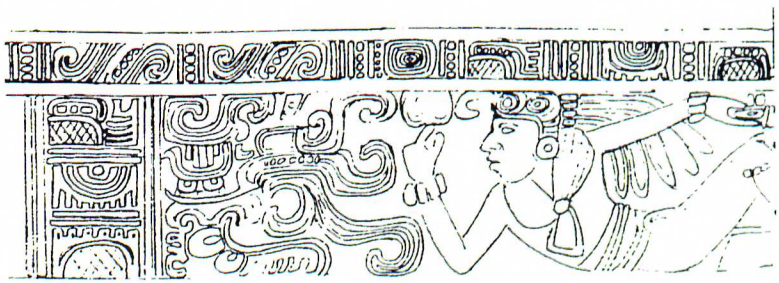


Figure 12.2 Pabellon Molded-carved bowl (Popol Vuh Musuem, Guatemala) showing both vertical and horizontal inscriptions. Drawing by Cherra Wyllie.

The bands themselves are bordered with a double outline. Frequently, grouped or paired bars or beaded elements separate individual glyph blocks. Initially the bars and stacked beads resemble bar and dot numerals, and appear to quantify adjacent hieroglyphs, yet on closer examination their structure is incongruous with other Mesoamerican numerical conventions—there are too many bars and too many dots.

Reading Order and Directionality

We will hypothesize that the glyph bands encode writing. Given their structure, the linear text either encapsulates visible speech (e.g. logo-phonetic writing) or intentionally mimics the appearance of such writing. Since our scribes are either the Maya or are consciously integrating elements of Maya layout and symbolism, the reading order and directionality very likely follows Maya prototypes.

We established that in Maya hieroglyphic writing, as well as several of the world's other hieroglyphic writing systems, the rule of thumb is to read *into the faces* of profiled figures (Fischer 1976, 1986, Robinson 1995). Our Pabellon glyphs offer us several examples of glyphic profiles—all left facing. Therefore, within the horizontal glyph bands encircling vases and bowls, reading order is left to right. The sequence mirrors the structure of Maya writing, especially the hieroglyphic bands encircling cylindrical vases and other ceramics, also read from left to right. And, as in Maya writing our eye files past glyphic profiles. This being the case, vertical glyph bands undoubtedly read from top to bottom, reflecting the structure of Maya prototypes.

Whereas the manufacturing technique for Pabellon bowls and vases involves joining two molded vessel halves, we might logically look for the start of the text just to the right of one of the seams. Repeating scroll-like elements often surround the areas where the two halves of the pot come together. I suspect that these are fillers, designed not to interfere with the flow of the text during the manufacturing process. Therefore, we begin reading with the hieroglyphs just to the right of these cloud or scroll-like forms.

Glyphs probably serving as fillers on a Pabellon bowl from Altar de Sacrificios.

Exploring Possibilities: Individual Hieroglyphs and Their Structure

As in Classic Maya hieroglyphic writing, individual glyph blocks consist of a main sign augmented by affixes situated on one or more of its the four sides. In Maya writing affixes modify glyphic features of the accompanying main sign or work together with that sign to provide words, phrases, or tenses (Figure 7.12). This is one suggestion that there is at least an element of phoneticism in these text; either that or sequential concepts are to be read as though they are phonetic writing. For example, since in several respects these registers resemble sky bands we might suppose that the symbols encode variable celestial or astrological information—as in an almanac or zodiac. Affixes and/or substitutions could therefore function like visible speech to aid the reader in understanding a sequence of changeable information. Pabellon bands, unlike Classic Maya texts, offer a limited number of affixes. Appendix 7 contains a catalogue of Pabellon hieroglyphs.

Comparing hieroglyphic registers from several Pabellon Molded-carved bowls and vases, we find several repeating elements. Given the frequency of signs this initially

challenges the assumption that we are looking at a syllabic system—since the corpus of syllabic signs within logo-syllabic systems generally number in the hundreds. Two particular symbols—one, a full or partially bordered sign with interior cross-hatching; the other, a series of nestling semi-circles culminating in an interior dot or circle—are the most ubiquitous forms within Pabellon registers. On close examination, we observe that the orientation of these symbols changes—with signs "facing" left, right, up, or down in relation to the sequence (Figure 12.3). This change in orientation signifies one of two things—either the orientation of the glyph modifies the meaning of a logographic sign or various orientations encode discrete units of sound.

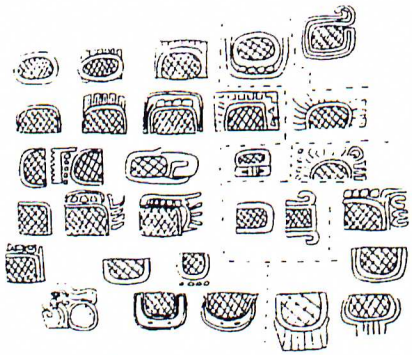


Figure 12.3 Cross-hatch glyphs exhibiting a variety of orientations and affixes.

Maya writing provides us with examples of how the same sign can have different meanings depending on context, orientation, or associated elements. For example, recall the Maya hieroglyphic signs we looked at in Chapter 7. In Figure 12.4a we have the Maya logograph *nik*, meaning flower. Figure 12.4c is phonetic *ma*, while an inversion of this sign, either individually or paired represents phonetic *la* (12.4b). Finally, when the same sign is framed within a cartouche it forms the 20th day sign *Ahaw* within the Maya Tzolk'in or 260 day sacred calendar (12.4d). In some instances the sign can also encode

Ahaw, referring to that same term applied to the title of a Maya ruler—who possesses, as David Stuart points out, a metaphoric connection with flowers (*nik)* the sun, and the day itself. If we accept the idea that one sign encapsulates a variety of different values depending on its orientation, we need to presuppose that the text encodes non-Mayan (or at least not *recognizably Mayan*) language. In short, if this is the case we are looking at another (non Classic Maya) writing system.

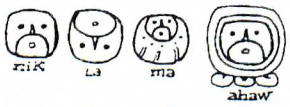


Figure 14.4 Different meanings through orientation and surrounding elements in Classic Maya writing.

Returning to our other possibility—that of a logograph whose meaning is modified through orientation—suggests a highly codified symbol system, such as musical notation. We cannot rule out that the Maya would have had such systems in addition to writing. This would certainly be in keeping with the inherent sophistication of Maya thought-- a world incorporating mathematics and astronomy, as well as an intricate cosmology. We must also consider that these hieroglyphic texts *are only found on* ceramics. Therefore, this type of pottery may have had specified uses or associations connected with the symbols contained within its registers. For example, glyphic orientation might refer to astronomical phases or configurations. Since the concentric semi-circles resemble Mesoamerican lunar symbols we might imagine that these alternating orientations represent phases of the moon. Recall that similar symbols descend from sky bands below the rim of Rio Blanco bowls from the Mixtequilla

Taken within the context of longer inscriptions, we can extend this idea still further. We might imagine that the hieroglyphs encode specific configurations of planets,

stars, or constellations. Yet we are still left with a variety of hieroglyphs that look nothing whatsoever like those found on Classic Maya sky bands—the latter which appear to show the *existence* of certain heavenly bodies rather than the active interrelationships between them (Figure 12.5) (for a discussion of sky bands see Carlson and Landis 1985, and Mibrath 1999). On the other hand, a phonetic interpretation of these texts does not rule out the insertion of astronomical symbols or references.

Figure 12.5 Example of a Maya sky band.

The extant Maya codices feature astronomical information based upon careful observations from a fixed point or points on earth (what scholars sometimes call "naked eye astronomy") Within these marvelous books, the Postclassic Maya ingeniously predict eclipse cycles, and chart the interrelationship between heavenly bodies. Permutations of celestial cycles form the heart of their calendric and numerical systems Although Late Maya books document these phenomena, the graphic symbols used to record these observations and events differ from the signs we see on Pabellon glyphic bands. This notion, in concert with the appearance of the vessels and "foreign" aspects of the iconography, suggests an importation of ideas as well as symbols. This is to say that if we look at these registers as "Maya"—manufactured *by* the Maya *for* the Maya—then we must also acknowledge the importation of non-Maya symbols and beliefs within a framework developed by the Maya themselves. The idea makes even more sense when we consider that at the same time and in the same area the Terminal Classic Maya are consciously inserting non-Maya calendric signs into traditionally structured hieroglyphic texts. We also see this where we have Pabellon vases with vertical bands of Maya

hieroglyphic inscriptions, but where non-Maya square-cartouche day signs appear on the body of the vessel (Figure 12.6).

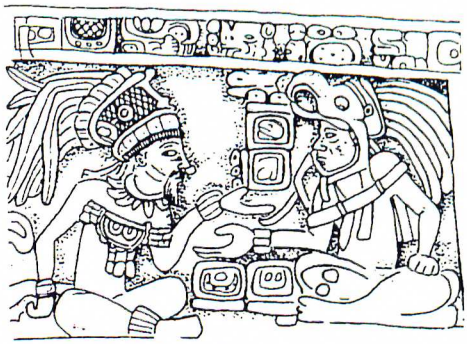


Figure 12.6 Scene from a Pabellon Molded-carved vase from Waxactun showing Classic and non-Classic glyph forms. Drawing by Cherra Wyllie

Towards Breaking the Code: A Preliminary Structural Analysis

In *The Maya Scribe and His World*, Michael Coe (Coe 1973, Stuart 2001 and 1989) identifies patterns and structure inherent in the Primary Standard Sequence (PSS). These dedicatory texts placed horizontally below the rim of Classic Maya vases acknowledge the object, its use, creator (the artist), and patron. As Reents-Budet (1994:13 and 16) points out—

> "Although the PSS is central to the aesthetics and meanings of Classic Maya pictorial pottery, as with written narrative it exists apart from the pictorial imagery ... does not comment on the pictorial imagery."

We return to our working premise: if our Pabellon artists are not themselves Maya, then they are consciously imitating the appearance of texts on Classic Maya vessels. The rim text surrounding Pabellon Molded-carved vases and bowls mirrors the format of the Maya Primary Standard Sequence, with one possible exception—that of scale

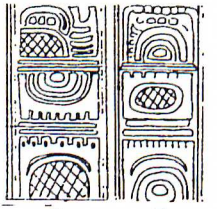


Figure 12.7 Vertical glyphic bands framing scenes on a Pabellon bowl (with Column A on one side of the vessel and Column B on the other) from the Popol Vuh Museum, Guatemala. Cherra Wyllie

On Pabellon Molded-carved bowls the hieroglyphs framed by vertical glyphic bands are individually taller and wider than glyphs within the horizontal band encircling the vessel just below the rim. This use of hieratic proportion indicates that information contained in vertical texts is of primary importance. In Classic Maya vases the PSS is larger in scale than the supplementary texts, or SSS (Secondary Standard Sequence). The latter represents the vertical inscriptions. In Pabellon Molded-carved vases and bowls these vertical texts generally come in twos. A column of vertical text mid-point on either side of the bowl divides the vessels into two relatively even picture planes, allowing for two scenes. The wide vertical glyph bands each consist of two to three sequentially placed hieroglyphs separated by one or more horizontal bands. These glyph bands frame the pictorial scenes on each side of the vessel, which is further defined by the horizontal band of text bordering it from above. Scenes themselves show lordly figures in semi-reclining postures—either individually or in twos, paired figures in the act of negotiations, or theatrical, somewhat rigid freeze-frames of warriors in battle. Although these compositions and accompanying hieroglyphs draw our eye into a maze of delicately sculpted relief, these scenes seem understated and harmonious when compared with the flourish of activity and animation on Rio Blanco bowls. I briefly analyze the iconography of standardized scenes in greater detail in Chapter 13. These pictorial programs feature

key individuals, identified by hairstyle, posture, costume, and symbolic ornamentation Relevant to our discourse on writing, I observe that select glyphic sequences relate to a subset of these pictorial scenes or characters. This infers that there is at least some relationship between image and text.

If we assume that Pabellon ceramic artists intentionally model the structure of the hieroglyph text to some degree on Maya prototypes, than we must also entertain the idea that the texts encode comparable information. Therefore, the format of the Classic Maya Primary Standard Sequence is our first key to unlocking inscriptions on Pabellon pots.

Horizontal Texts (RTSS)

Peter Keeler, Director of the Maya Meetings at the University of Texas, Austin, walked me through the steps of structural analysis, and together we joined forces, working to understand Pabellon texts. I drew and compiled the hieroglyphic texts contained in the appendix. Peter then "cut and pasted" constituent elements of these inscriptions into comparative columns, showing common features as well as apparent substitutions.

Our findings bring us into areas beyond the scope of this dissertation. We concur that while the hieroglyphs probably encode language, there is nothing (apart from day signs) connecting it to *Veracruz* language or writing. Keeler and I present this work in more detail under separate cover (Keeler and Wyllie nd).

This said I now summarize the process leading us to these conclusions. Recall that one criterion for phonetic decipherment was a sufficiently large data base (Coe 1992). Coe also states that there "should be a bi-lingual inscription of some sort, one member of

which is in a known writing system" (ibid). The text also needs to be long enough to reveal syntactical structure.

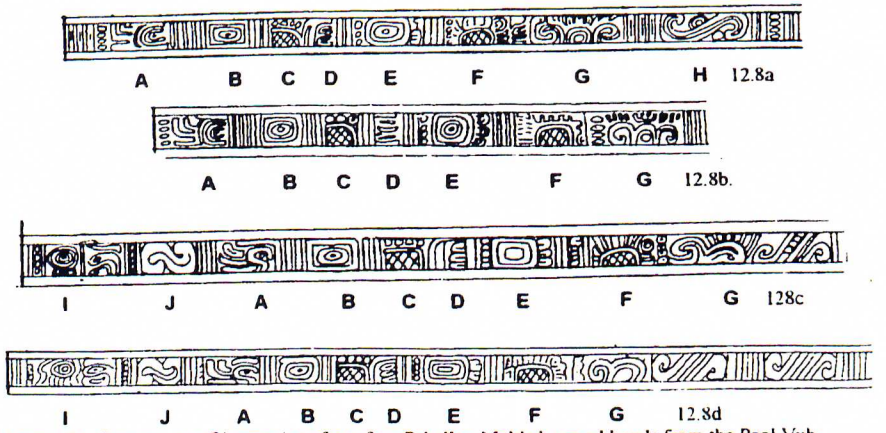


Figure 12.8 Comparison of inscriptions from four Pabellon Molded-carved bowls from the Pool Vuh Museum, Guatemala (12.8a), Amparo Museum, Puebla, Mexico (12.8b), Barakat Gallery, Beverly Hills, CA (12.8c), and K3414 (Kerr Data Base) (12.8d).

Appendix 8 provides the reader with horizontal and vertical inscriptions from complete or partially complete vessels. These include bowls referred to as. 1) Altar de Sacrificios I (R. Adams 1973), 2) Altar de Sacrificios II (Harvard Peabody collection), 3) de Nottebohm Bowl (private collection), 4) Popol Vuh Museum Bowl, 5) Seibal Bowl I (Sabloff 1975), 6) Barakat Bowl (LA gallery), 7) Amparo Museum Bowl (Puebla, Mexico), 8) K3414 (Kerr), 9) K3415, 10) Uaxactun Bowl I, 11) Uaxactun Bowl II, 12) Seibal Bowl II (S-2063) (Sabloff 1975), 13) Chiccana Bowl Y330 ST 3-A, 14) Seibal Bowl III (Seibal Burial 31) (Sabloff 1975). Texts exhibit a large degree of structural uniformity. The most common horizontal inscription occurs on bowls featuring a semi-reclining figure sporting a neckerchief and maize god hairstyle (found on the Popul Vuh Museum Bowl, Altar de Sacrificios I, Barakat Bowl, Amparo Museum Bowl, K3413, and

K3415). In a FAX dated August 19, 2001, Peter Keeler makes these preliminary observations—

> *"The Rim Text Standard Sequence (RTSS) has at least 7 elements. Like the Maya PSS the order is invariable, always the same, but not all elements are necessarily present in a given text. Terminology (RTSS) does not imply the RTSS has anything in common with PSS other than the above stated RTSS is best exemplified by the Amparo and Barakat pots."*

Peter and I agree that the first hieroglyph in this sequence (Glyph A) is a left-facing set of elements giving the vague impression of an animal. Its defining features are a rounded or semi-circular form on the right, with horizontal feather-like forms to the left of it—with upper "feathers" curving upwards. This hieroglyph is nearly always present in this inscription, although it adopts a variety of slightly different appearances.

Our second common element (Glyph B) consists of a series of concentric circles within a rectangular cartouche. At times this sign abuts the lower rim of the glyph band, giving it the appearance of a circle imbedded in a semi-rectangular arch. Peter notes its resemblance to the Maya mirror glyph.

The third glyph (Glyph C) consists of the top half of a semi-circle with interior cross-hatching. Sometimes the semi-circle is halved, pressing against the registers separating individual glyph blocks. In most cases the cross-hatch glyph has a superfix of four circles or short bars often topped by an arching shape, forming a sort of umbrella above these elements. Given its position within the text, we might assume that both cross-hatch glyphs (semi-circular or quartered) and superfixes (whether circles or bars) serve the same or similar function within the inscription. The next glyph (Glyph D) is probably a suffix of the preceding one—consisting of dot or thick bar elements within an enclosure similar to one above the cross-hatch glyph. Sometimes this portion of the text has the

appearance of Chinese brushstrokes—small discrete elements broad and flat on one end, then curving to form a point.

The next hieroglyph (Glyph E) is another series of concentric circles, but always more rounded in shape than the one preceding it. This hieroglyph has four to five dots or beaded elements to its left and a Maya-style suffix of pedal-shaped forms. It is worth noting that the textual sequence is quite formulaic: the "mirror glyph" appears without affixes in the first position, but always with them in the second.

Our next glyph (Glyph F) also suggests that what appears to be the same hieroglyph as the preceding cross-hatch glyph, exhibits slightly different attributes when encountered for the second time. Rather than a superfix of four dots, this semi-circular cross-hatch glyph is surrounded above and to the left by a series of curvaceous lines which emanate from the rounded form like rays of light or vapors. Circles or clouds of foam form to the right of the hieroglyph. At times the elements surrounding the glyph look crenellated, but both forms are distinct from the previous cross-hatched glyph.

Next we have a curled or scrolled element (Glyph G). The scroll curves to the left, but often has an arch-shaped element to its immediate right. In other instances this arch-shaped element is in turn abutted by a right-facing scroll—creating a symmetrical form

In certain texts we have a horizontally-oriented *S*-shape topped with an eye-like form. In all like texts whether this glyph is present or not we have a subsequent series of two to four scroll devices, which I do not think have any specific encoded meaning.

After this sequence the next glyph is frequently a series of concentric circles placed above little legs or supports. Biomorphic shapes appear to the right of this glyph.

At times they look like paisley or pollywogs. After another divider, we have a scroll-like cloud shape, which also takes other forms (such as in K3413).

The sequence of hieroglyphs then repeats itself beginning with the vague animal shape in position A. The form and sequence of the hieroglyphs, as I mentioned earlier, seems intricately wedded to the iconographic program in the two panels forming the main body of the vessel.

In some instances we found substitutions within the formulaic sequence. As with the Rio Blanco bowls, carving the leather-hard clay allowed artisans flexibility in rendering the hieroglyphs—permitting them to modify style or even content.

Figure 12.9 Examples of the Maya PSS from Coe and Kerr 1998

The Classic Maya Primary Standard Sequence (PSS), like the Pabellon sequence (what Keeler calls RTSS), is highly repetitious. Explaining this pattern in the PSS, Stuart (Stuart 2001 and 1989) breaks the order down for the reader into its most fundamental elements (divided into three commonly encountered forms, progressing from simple to elaborate):

1. Possessed noun/ Personal Name
2. Possessed noun/ Prepositional phrase/ Personal Name
3. Introducing glyphs/ Possessed noun/ Prepositional phrase/ Personal Name

Individual hieroglyphs on the Classic Maya PSS range in number from 3 or 4 to as many as 22 (Coe and Kerr 1998). The sequence often begins with an Initial Sign, followed by the profiled head of the old god Pawahtún or a dedicatory substitution. Next, we encounter a series describing the physical and artistic properties of the vessel—whether it

was carved or painted, or vase or bowl, the glyph for *u ts'ib*, "his writing or painting," sometimes followed by the name of the artist. The next glyph tells us the use of the vessel ("for cacao" or "for maize gruel"). Finally we are given the name and title of the patron for whom the vessel was created (e.g. "his or her drinking vessel," followed by the name of the owner (ibid).

Michael Coe and Justin Kerr (ibid) point out that these pictorial vases invariably come from funerary contexts. The intricate connection to the Underworld and the afterlife offer us some insight into comparable use of Pabellon wares. Whole vessels, like those found at Seibal, served as grave offerings (see Chapter 6). The Amparo Museum bowl, for example, was "ritually killed" by drilling a small bullet-sized hole at the base. A majority of Pabellon (and Rio Blanco) sherds comes from ballcourts. The Ballcourt has significant Underworld associations; for it was here that the Hero Twins battled the Lords of the Night in a mythological ballgame at the dawn of creation (Tedlock 1996), a story which undoubtedly has regional variations.

Using the repetitious formula first identified by Coe as his guide, Keeler compared the Maya PSS with the Pabellon PSS (or RTSS). The two forms, on initial examination, look extremely different. He further compared the Maya PSS with a hieroglyphic inscription from the Monjas at Chichen Itza, and a partial Pabellon Molded-carved glyphic sequence from Becan. His comparisons, graphically depicted in Appendix 12.3, offer a visual display of parallel information. The hieroglyphs offer comparable information.

At this stage, I depart from launching into a lengthy analysis since 1) these are essentially Keeler's findings (his to publish), and 2) they have nary to do with the central

dissertation topic—namely documenting the signs, symbols, and hieroglyphs of ancient Veracruz during the Classic-Postclassic transition. Yet they do help us differentiate between overlapping glyphic and iconographic traditions coexisting in Mesoamerica during the Terminal Classic period, and hopefully add another voice to the discourse on the "foreign" (sometimes pointing to the Gulf Coast) nature of Non-Classic glyphic forms (Adams; R. E. W. Adams 1973; Graham 1971a, b, 1973, 1990; Sabloff,, 1973; Sabloff and Willey 1967).

Preliminary Findings

Keeler's preliminary analysis underscores the structural relationships between "Pabellon texts" and Classic Maya hieroglyphs. Following these patterns we deduce:

1. Texts on Pabellon Molded-carved ceramics represent logo-phonetic writing using a set syntactical sequence. Hieroglyphic affixes and substitutions further support the position that these inscriptions encode prescribed semantic and glottographic values. Such an interpretation does not preclude the presence of astronomical information.
2. Whereas the structure, sequence, and hieroglyphic corpus exhibit greater correspondence with Classic Maya writing than they do with any known Veracruz script, Pabellon glyphs are probably (although not conclusively) a Terminal Classic regional variation of Maya script encoding a Mayan language. Hieroglyphs at Chichen Itza (Harris) offer an analogue to this supposition insofar as—graphicologically-speaking—they depart from Classic prototypes while

sharing comparable structure and phonetic value. If this is the case, we are looking at a different *script* rather than a different *writing system.*

3. The incorporation of southern Veracruz day signs and hieroglyphs within Pabellon Molded-carved ceramics and related materials attests to the influence of Veracruz ideology and trade. Distribution of ballgame materials (Chapter 4), iconography (Chapter 13), and ceramics types (Chapter 7) bolster this assertion.

The fall of the Classic Maya political and religious system, undoubtedly expressed itself in new ways. Long Count dates recording dynastic history disappear. Square cartouche day signs and a symbolic vocabulary connected with Veracruz merchants and ballgame ritual enters the Maya lowlands. The power of Maya deified kings wanes or disappears entirely. In the aftermath of these changes, did new centers in the Pasion region and Yucatan abandon elite, liturgical language expressed in Classic Maya hieroglyphs? We can imagine Pasion artisans asserting the authority of new regional rule in the spoken language of the people, expressed in glyph bands and columns usually reserved for Classic Maya hieroglyphs. Public monuments at Seibal and Chichen Itza continue using the universal Maya written language of earlier kings. What changes is the notion of time, sometimes expressed in Veracruz day signs. These hieroglyphs, as we will see in the next two chapters, accompany the signs, symbols, and iconography of Gulf Coast trade

Chapter Thirteen
Iconography

The iconography of Late Classic Papaloapan-Mixtequilla anchors southern Veracuz hieroglyphs securely within the context of "Classic Veracruz" style and materials. Southern Veracruz symbolism finds its way from north-central Veracruz south into the Maya lowlands. This receptivity to what was essentially a new religious order indicates that by the Ninth Century Veracruz traders were an economic *tour de force.*

Evidence for this near evangelical merchant order gave rise to a plethora of colorful hypotheses By far the most persistent historic reconstruction involves the Putun Maya, Sir J Eric Thompson's "Phonecians of the New World."

The Putun or Chontal Maya, according to Thompson (Thompson 1970), were sea traders whose homeland, Potonchan, was situated between southern Campeche and the delta of Tabasco's Usumacinta and Grijalva rivers. They claimed dominion over coastal passages along Yucatan's Peninsula, as well as key riverine routes into the interior Strategic Putun strongholds included: the island of Cozumel and the inland city of Chichen Itza (headquarters of a Putun branch known as the Itza) and Altar de Sacrificios in the Pasion region (which they called Acala or Acalan meaning "Land of the Canoe People"). Thompson tells us—

> "Between A.D 850 and A.D. 950 this once peripheral people controlled, in part or absolutely, northern Tabasco, southern Campeche, Cozumel, Bakhalal, and Chetumal along the east coast of the peninsula; Chichen Itza and probably other centers in central Yucatan; and for a short while, much of the Pasion drainage as well as Ucanal in the Belize drainage. The expansion of this peripheral group at the close of the Classic period into the former heartland of Maya culture is comparable to Macedian aggrandizement at the expense of Classic Greece when the latter was past its cultural peak" (Thompson 1970:4-5).

Admittedly, the notion of the Putun holds a certain romantic appeal. In the early stages of my research I followed Thompson's coastal routes searching for hieroglyphic evidence of Chontalapa-based sea-faring merchants. There *were* coastal trade routes during the Late Classic-Early Postclassic, but none that I could detect offered a clear explanation for the spread of new art styles, belief systems, and symbols; nothing in Thompson's reconstruction accounting for a "Mexicanized Maya" presence at Seibal, Chichen Itza, or Cotzumalhuapa.

Recall that I noted a correspondence between the distribution of stone yokes and *hachas* (Chapter 4) and Molded-carved Fine Orange ceramics (Chapter 6). Both classes of objects are underrepresented or notably absent in the intervening coastal areas located between Veracruz and the Yucatan Peninsula. Square-cartouche day signs are likewise absent in Tabasco and Chiapas. Potonchan, the Putun epicenter, lacks the materials, hieroglyphs, and iconography diagnostic of the very "foreign" presence supposedly derived from the spread of Chontal Maya trade and influence. Following J. Eric Thompson's Putun Maya trail to help explain key connections between the Veracruz Gulf Coast and the Terminal Classic Maya is a red herring.

In this chapter I document iconography and symbols that, along with hieroglyphs and materials, support my position that these signs originated in southern Veracruz. As with the hieroglyphs, I view examples of Veracruz symbolic vocabulary as componential elements within a larger narrative framework. I identify many of the gods, symbols, rituals, and players informing Veracruz-origin mythology and religious practices, as well as interactions between key players and icons. Suffice it to say that a comprehensive

treatment of Late Classic Veracruz iconography would require several volumes. My objective here is to prove that the hieroglyphs examined in this thesis form part of a greater ideological system; accoutrements and practices made manifest in an elegant language of visual imagery. Beliefs imbedded in this iconography ultimately transform and shape ancient Mexican thought during the Postclassic Period.

The following diagnostic attributes link the Late Classic Veracruz art and iconography with that of the Terminal Classic Maya. All of these traits at one time appear in conjunction with square-cartouche day signs and writing forming the basis of this study

1. The presence of southern Veracruz deities, which become amalgamated into the pantheon of the ancient Maya.
2. Increased presence of iconography and artifacts connected with the rubber ballgame and ballgame decapitation ritual.
3. The use of serpent iconography as a metaphor for blood. A plethora of serpent iconography is frequently seen in costume elements including belts, skirts, and headdresses writhing with live snakes.
4. Figures wearing broad-brimmed hats connected with Pochteca-type merchants.
5. Figures carrying bundles, backracks, fans, and walking sticks—icons of long-distance traders.
6. Paired figures in the process of negotiations.
7. Figures carrying flat sticks with curved tops (resembling field hockey sticks).
8. The wearing of limpet shells by key figures in the iconographic program.

The Spread of Veracruz Gods and Religion

Southern Veracruz cosmology initially spread beyond its geographic boundaries during the Formative Period, producing the first unifying cultural force in ancient Mesoamerica. Centuries later this position of prominence was usurped by the formidable shadow of Teotihuacan. It is not until the powers of Teotihuacan wane that we see a resurgence of Gulf Coast style and symbolism disseminated with renewed zeal (see Chapter 14)

Before this time several deities of the ancient Veracruz pantheon were noticeably absent in Central Mexico and the Maya domain. Yet ultimately Gulf Coast supernaturals and beliefs were absorbed and integrated into the cosmologies of both areas. The transformation is so complete that we frequently look at these gods and goddesses as quintessentially "Aztec" or "Maya," little realizing that in many cases they have no Central Mexican or Maya antecedents.

Veracruz origins for several Mexican deities are well documented. These include Xipe Totec, Tlazleteotl, the Cihuateotl, Ehecatl, Huehueteotl, and the Feathered Serpent. Unfortunately, our familiarity is generally restricted to Aztec manifestations of these gods formulated from ethnohistoric accounts using Mexica informants. Essentially, Veracruz deities are viewed through the filtering lens of their adoptive cultures. Moreover, the very fact of their Veracruz origins was often used to explain abhorrent qualities or excesses, such as overt sexuality, traits that simultaneously titillated and repelled the Aztec's new Spanish overlords. The following is a brief look at diagnostic features of southern Veracruz supernaturals and related symbols introduced into the Maya region during the last stages of the Classic Period.

Veracruz Solar Deity. The Veracruz Solar Deity first appears seated on an anthropomorphic throne on Tres Zapotes Stela C, one of the earliest examples of Isthmian or Epi-Olmec writing. His costume consists of a solar disk dominating his body, rays emanating like compass points from four cardinal directions.

Centuries later we see this same symbol associated with a richly ornamented (perhaps feathered) serpent on Rio Blanco vases. One of the processional characters on this bowl type carries the solar orb as though it were a shield—the head and serpent body

trailing down from it like a paper dragon. At Las Higueras another image links the solar disk with serpents, although somewhat indirectly. Like the deified ruler or sun god from earlier Tres Zapotes Stela C, the Las Higueras figure is perched comfortably on a throne, arms outstretched in a posture immediately reminiscent of the bird-costumed warrior. Like the Stela C figure, the Las Higueras deity is dominated by his solar costume. His throne rests on a platform with two large-scale interwoven serpents.

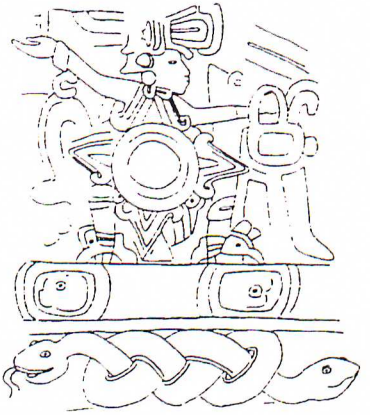
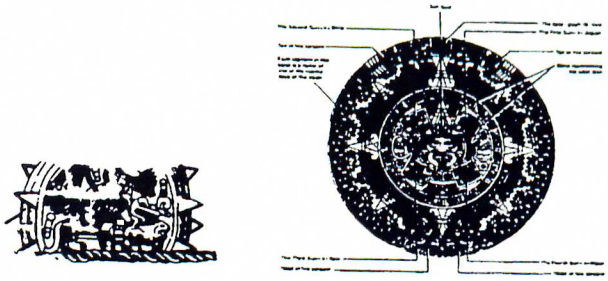


Figure 13.1 Veracruz Solar Deity at Las Higueras
Drawing by Cherra Wyllie

A version of this god was eventually adopted in northern Yucatan where it appears in the Upper Temple of the Jaguars at Chichen Itza. He carries darts and an atalatl. Dubbed "Captain Sun Disk," the figure is strangely anomalous in the Maya world. And, despite its so-called "Mexican" appearance, there are no examples of this symbol at either Teotihuacan or Tula—two places generally credited for originating "Mexican" traits in Maya iconography.

The symbol is immediately identifiable in its later incarnation as the so-called Aztec Calendar Stone—a cosmological diagram of previous worlds or "suns," the

circular scheme encircled by two Xiucoatl fire serpents and inter-dimensional travelers. We find Xiucoatli and Tonatiuh, the Aztec Solar deity, extensively in Aztec iconography (Milbraith 1999:82; Taube 1992:142; 1994:224).



13.2a 13.2b

Figure 13.2 Solar symbols and associated deities from Chichen Itza (13.2a) and among the Postclassic Aztec of Central Mexico (13.2b)

The Ballgame Cult and Associated Ritual

Blood in the form of seven serpents sprouting from the decapitated torso of sacrificed ballplayers (Wilkerson 1980:223) is both exotic and surreal. With no apparent relationship they recall 4th Century sculpture of ancient India. Vishnu portrayed with seven serpents rising behind his head to form a halo, or the later 12th Century "serpent mother" wearing a headdress of seven serpents (Smith 1968:113). A 12th Century Buddha in central Vietnam wears a similar seven serpent halo (Groslier 1962:169), while in neighboring Cambodia one enters the causeway leading to Angkor Thom passing the rising image of the serpent Vasuki, with seven heads, its body held back by a long row of demons (Charles-Picard 1972:393). Our analogous American variety represents the preferred mode of sacrifice for the losing ballplayer—decapitation. Blood spewing from the severed arteries becomes animated, erectile serpents, which fan out like a bouquet, forming a substitute head crowning the still-active body. These ballplayers, headless

though they may be, continue to crouch or sit. It is only their severed head—generally a skull or cartoon-like head framed by a circular rubber ball—that looks at all inanimate.

We see headless ballplayers in Veracruz depicted on El Tajin Pyramid of the Niches Sculpture 7, Stela 1 from Aparicio, on Rio Blanco bowls, and on mural paintings at Las Higueras. In both the Aparicio stela and Las Higueras murals the figure sits on what appears to be a throne. Both wear thick yokes girdled around their hips, fronted by a flaring arched palma. The iconography suggests that our sacrificed ballplayer is a ruler, who somehow continues to live on despite this loss of head. It has been suggested that the colossal Olmec heads (minus bodies!) portray ballplayer-rulers. If this analysis is correct, then the ritual role of Veracruz kings as athletes is an extremely ancient one, surviving more than two thousand years of history in the region. We are also reminded of the Quiche Maya creation story of the Popul Vuh where Hunaphu—one of the famed Hero Twins—loses his head to the adversarial Lords of the Night in an underworld ballgame

Figure 13.3 Stela 1, Aparicio, Veracruz

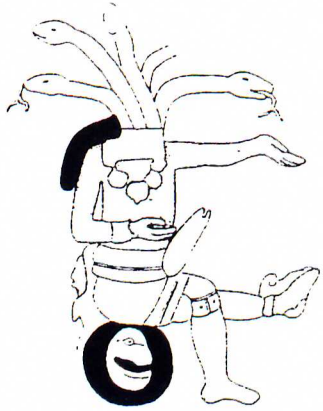


Figure 13.4 Figure from Las Higueras Murals
Drawings by Cherra Wyllie

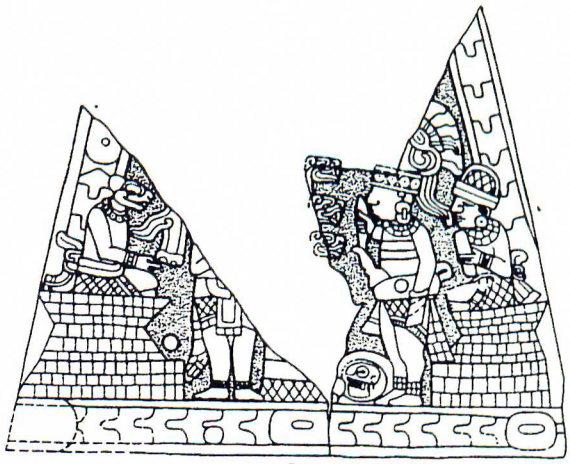
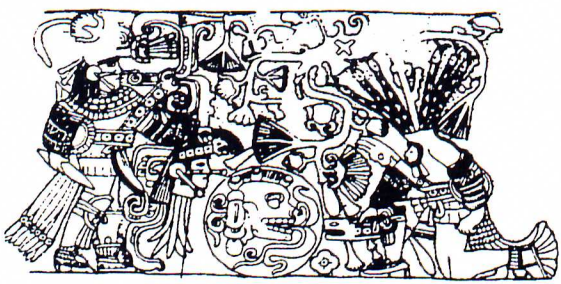


Figure 13.5 Decapitation scene from El Tajin. Drawing by Michael Kampen 1972

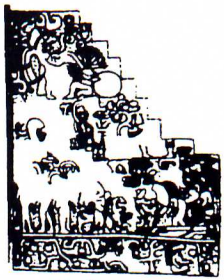
In El Tajin imagery, as well as on Rio Blanco vessels and the Higueras paintings, the severed head accompanies the unfortunate victim on the associated pictorial program. The skull or severed head forms the core enveloped by a dense rubber ball. At Higueras, the head is so un-lifelike that it seems almost stuffed—a head more befitting a doll or a scarecrow than a sacrificed hero or lord. The South Ballcourt affords us the view of the ballplayer under the sacrificial knife, seen poised at his throat, his head cocked back continuing the overall arch of his body.

There are several Classic Maya examples showing heads encased in rubber balls, so the association between ballplaying and decapitation did not necessarily come into the Maya area from the Gulf Coast. Maya examples originate from such sites as El Peru/Site Q (Schele and Miller 1986: Pl. 101a, and Fig. VI-12, Cohadas 1991:251), La Esperanza (Cohadas 1991:260), and Yaxchilan (Cohadas 1991:262-263; Schele and Freidel 1991:306-307). What contrasts these Classic Maya examples with the Veracruz ones is the use of blood serpents.

We *do* find blood spurting from the decapitated bodies of ballplayers in Maya contexts, but with one exception this convention is late—always in the Terminal Classic. As at El Tajin, relief carvings showing ballgame scenes adorn the flat surface of the Great Ballcourt at Chichen Itza. Seven serpents rise from the severed head of a ballplayer crouching in a stance connected with the ballgame itself. As in the Veracruz examples, his loss of head does not hinder his activities. We see his ball-covered head on the ground beside him. He lives on, it seems, as both ball and player, suggesting a certain eternity gained through the act of sacrifice.



13.6a



13.6b

13.6c

Figure 13.6 Ballgame decapitation scenes from Chichen Itza showing blood serpents rising from the severered heads of ballplayers. 13.6a Ballcourt panel. 13.6b Ballcourt. 13.6c Ballgame stone.

Ballplayers are also the featured characters in the monumental relief sculpture at Cotzumalhuapa. As in El Tajin, a victim on Monument 1, Bilbao, Guatemala, endures the sacrificial knife. Leafy plants with winding stems figure prominently in Cotzumalhuapa iconography. The abundance of twisting floral forms recalls similar plant life animating the background of Rio Blanco pots, or inexplicably providing a backdrop to the ballgame scene on Chichen Itza's ballcourt. At El Tajin, plants and trees spring from the prostrate

bodies of sacrificial victims. These forms become an increasingly popular motif during the Terminal Classic period, adorning the relief-carved pottery that seems but a pale imitation of the delicate forms and lively scenes on Veracruz wares.

As discussed in Chapter Five, Tiquisate wares from the southern Pacific coast of Guatemala in the department of Escuintla contain ballgame decapitation scenes. While iconography at Chichen Itza and Cotzumalhuapa connects this phenomenon to the Terminal Classic, the cylindrical tripod vases are thought to date to the Middle Classic period (Parsons 1991:206-207; Hellmuth 1975, 1978).

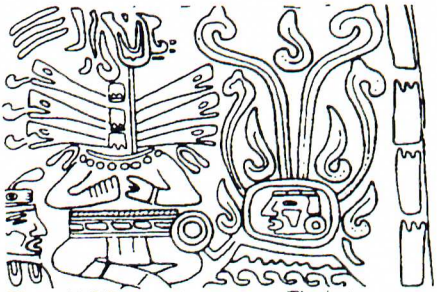


Figure 13.7 Decapitation scene on Tiquisate ware
Nicholas Hellmuth

Figure 13.7 Decapitation scene from from Cotzumalhuapa

Serpent Couture

The severed arteries of decapitated victims number among the abundant snake elements in Late and Terminal Classic Veracruz art. The terracotta sculpture of the Mixtequilla is replete with figures—predominantly female—wearing snake-belted skirts or Medusa-style headdresses. The site of Nopiloa, in particular, has a substantial number

of large scale hollow female figures with serpent costume elements—double-headed snake belts knotted around their waists, and sometimes double-headed serpent crowns.

Figure 13.8 Terra cotta head with serpent headdress. Museo Amparo. Cherra Wyllie.

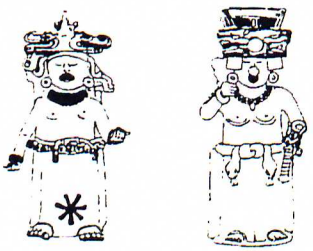


Figure 13.9 Nopiloa figures from southern Veracruz with serpent iconography.

Although the Great Goddess reigns prominent at Teotihuacan, her icon is the spider, not the snake. Evidence suggests that these "serpent goddesses" originate in southern Veracruz, underlying a serpent cult particularly active during the Late Classic-Early Postclassic transition. This very likely provides the antecedent for Coatlique—"She of the Serpent Skirt"—the principle goddess of the Aztecs and sacred mother of the Mexica patron deity Huizilopochtli. The famed monumental sculpture of this deity exhibits several Veracruz-associated attributes. Like the Nopiloa figures, two twisted snakes descend like tassels, fronting her skirt. Blood serpents emerge from her torso, replacing her severed head, reminding us of blood serpents connected with ballgame

ritual decapitation. Her thick belt looks very much like a yoke, complete with palma and hacha attachments.

Figure 13.10 The Aztec Goddess Coatlique

Figure 13.11 Seibal ST 13 Graham

The protagonist in Seibal Stela 13 wears a snake-belted skirt similar to those worn by the Nopiloa figures. Both the Nopiloa sculptures and Seibal figure prefigure the Postclassic goddess Cihuacoatl—literally "snake woman" (Miller and Taube 1993 60-61), associated with midwifery and sweatbaths. Cihuacoatl was also the title of the co-regent of the Aztec Empire. While the Tlatoani ("the Speaker") was the more prominent regent, dealing with external relations of the Aztec world, the Cihuacoatl administered internal affairs. Although the Aztec Cihuacoatl was male, he held a female title Together, the Cihuacoatl and Tlatoani embodied the pairing of male and female opposites.

Artists at Las Higueras portray women as prominent nobles—possibly rulers—actively involved in ritual processions. Figures carrying fans and parasols attend these tall, aristocratic women, who gesture like fashion models, exhibiting a haughty

demeanor. The Late Classic Maya also portray pious, stately queens. They are beautiful and detached, whether watching the torture of war captives or in piercing their own tongues.

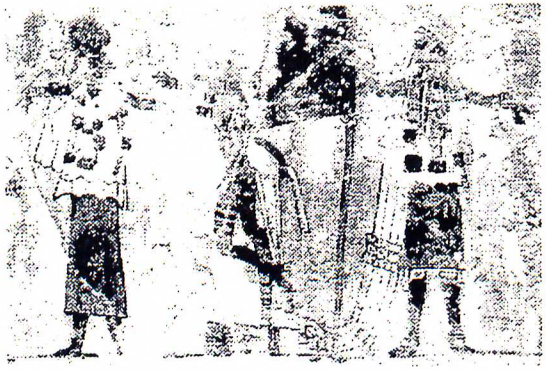


Figure 13.12 Stately queens from the Las Higueras murals.

Women's prominence in affairs of state appears to wane significantly through time. Male co-regents apparently replace these former queens, usurping ritual roles associated with "feminine attributes." We see Late Classic Maya rulers at Palenque and Copan wearing jade beaded skirts, associating them with the Maya Maize God. Yet the Seibal Lord dressed in a serpent skirt suggests a conscious appropriation of status connected with Veracruz female elites and supernaturals. He is cross-dressing, wearing women's apparel, and pillaging the mana or *chul'el* of female blood and reproductive cycles

If this is indeed an appropriation, as I am suggesting, we are left to ponder whether this is a reverential tribute to such powers, or an act of misogyny. This mystery is intensified by the central location of Seibal Burial 1 within the "palace complex" of Structure A-14. Seibal Burial 1 contains a young adult female and represents "the richest burial known for Seibal" (Tourtellot 1990:87-88). This is also one of the two burials at

Seibal containing Pabellon Molded-carved vessels (ibid). Tourtellot, on tentative evidence, suggests that the interred is a sacrificial victim (ibid). Why would Seibal invest its riches in "the tomb of the unknown slave girl?" This hardly makes sense.

As Sabloff keenly observes, our protagonist on Seibal Stela 13 is one of the lounging lords of Pabellon ware. We identify him by his spiky overgrown crew cut, heavy jade bead necklace, and scanty apparel. His feet, like other figures portrayed on Pabellon ceramics, are bare. Barefeet and "brushed up" hairstyle are among distinctive traits listed by Sabloff (1970) and Adams (1973) for figures on Tenth Cycle Monuments and featured in Pabellon iconography By Adams' (1973) account, these traits are not shared in Classic Maya iconography Yet both the rock star hairstyle and lack of footware are common to figures in narrative scenes on Veracruz ceramics and architectural relief sculpture

Figure 13.13 Ruler in beaded necklace on Pabellon bowl from Seibal. From Sabloff.

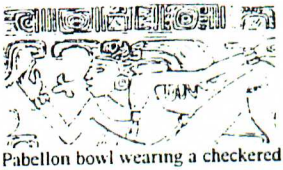


Figure 13.14 Ruler on Pabellon bowl wearing a checkered neckerchief. C Wylie

In Chapter Eleven I discuss "flowery" speech scrolls, emanating from the mouth of one of the semi-reclining Pabellon lords. The characters emitting flowery speech wear checkered neckerchiefs. Their bangs jut forward in an inward-turning scroll, which has

come to be known as the Maize God hairdo (referring to tassels of maize—which the hairstyle mimics). The Maya Maize god is intricately linked to the Royal house, so in Terminal Classic Maya context we should not be surprised to find rulers with Maize God attributes.

The other recurring character reclining on Pabellon bowls is an elite figure wearing heavy jade beads, and a shock of what Adams calls "brushed up" hair. This is the same figure found wearing a serpent skirt on Seibal Stela 13. These two figures—the lounging lord emitting flowery speech and wearing a scout or "Pioneer"-style neckerchief and his spiky-hairdo-ed counterpart—recall the political partnership of Tlatoani and Cihuacoatl that follows centuries later far to the north. Yet there is no obvious precedent for this political institution in pre-Aztec Central Mexico. Could we be looking at the beginning of a new system of joint rule? We do know that the nature of rulership changes at Chichen Itza during the Terminal Classic period (Schele and Freidel 1990).

Some scholars see a progressive marginalizing of women in Mesoamerican political life following the Classic Period. Perhaps in donning the southern Veracruz inspired Cihuacoatl-Tlazleteotl serpent skirt, the Stela 13 figure becomes the queen of Seibal, empowered by the goddess' ferocious icons of reproductive fertility. Gone certainly are Classic Maya depictions of queens actively participating in religious and courtly life.

The relationship between the Seibal 13 ruler portrait and accompanying square-cartouche day signs is another mystery. Like his costume, the day sign has the structure and appearance of Mixtequilla calendric signs. The main sign, with a preliminary reading of "water," does not have a precise Veracruz counterpart in this form. However,

water jugs *do* connect with Veracruz goddess imagery and associated blood serpents. A human or supernatural figure in the Las Higueras paintings pours water replete with symbols of abundance from such an *olla*. While the Great Goddess of Teotihuacan and her attendants pour water and symbols of wealth and fertility from similar jugs, the Higueras figure wears a distinct serpent headdress. Twisted snakes undulate forward like a windsock and wrap around parts of the vessel. We see this figure frequently in southern Veracruz sculpture, mouth slightly parted, serpents stemming from her crown like Old World apotropaic deities. Her actions, costume, and water jug are later reflected in the attributes of Goddess I of the Postclassic Maya codices.

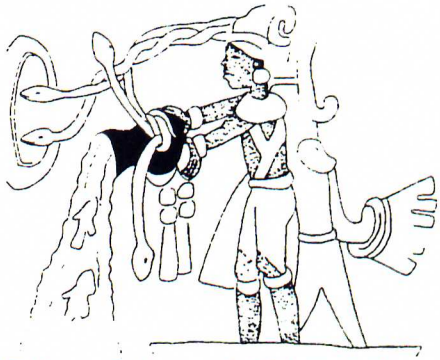


Figure 13.15 Veracruz Goddess from Las Higueras murals. Drawing by Cherra Wyllie

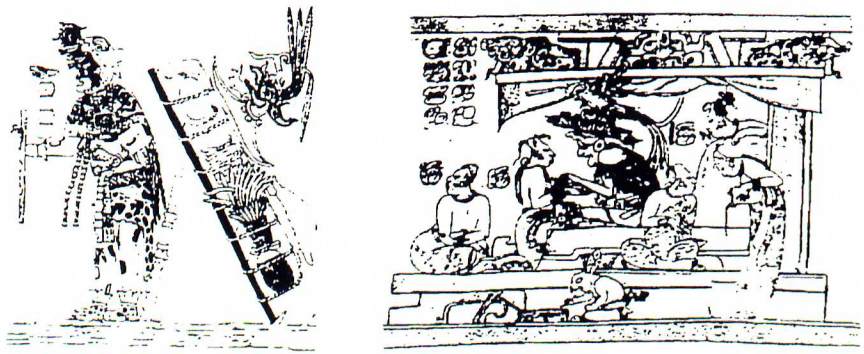
Figure 13.16 Goddess I from Dresden from Taube 1992.

Enter, *The Pochtun*

Peter Keeler (personal communication) coined the term *Pochtun* to describe southern Veracruz traders. The word combines the Nahuatl word for Aztec long-distance merchant-traders, *pochteca*, with *Putun*, the name for the enigmatic people so often credited with the dissemination of goods and "Mexican" influences during the Terminal Classic period. The Late Classic entrepreneurs of southern Veracruz are at once both and

neither "pochteca" and/or "Putun." For lack of a better term, I think Pochtun is wonderfully appropriate.

Throughout Late Classic Veracruz we see these traders represented by their walking staffs, ambassadorial fans, and backracks. One of the most salient features connected with this merchant class is a broad-brimmed hat, frequently fronted with a bird. For the Classic Maya, this was one of the defining characteristics of God L, the patron of merchants (Miller and Taube 1993:112). We see God L in Classic Maya form featured in the Late Classic wall painting of Cacaxtla in Central Mexico. Whether portrayed on Late Classic Jaina figurines or in scenes from codex-style vases, the Maya show God L in an unflattering light. He is old, wrinkled, and lecherous (Miller 1999:163-164). Apart from his broad-brimmed hat, walking staff, and backrack we frequently encounter this god lifting the skirts or grabbing the breasts of beautiful young noblewomen or goddesses. Why would seemingly elegant, aristocratic women endure the advances of this toothless, cigar-smoking old coot? Why are beautiful, young women frequently paired with unattractive old men? In a word: money.



13.17a 13.17b

Figure 13.17 Late Classic depictions of God L from Cacaxtla (13.17a) and on a Classic Maya vase (13.17b) from Taube 1992 [Coe 1973].

Mesoamerican merchants were a class unto themselves. Among the Aztecs, their power was kept in check by requiring them to offer pot-latch style feasts. So as not to draw attention to their wealth, they re-entered the city loaded with luxury trade goods under the cover of night. They served as warriors, spies, emissaries, and ambassadors in service of the Aztec Empire (Miller and Taube 1993:112). Because of their command of foreign customs and languages they provided an invaluable service, especially the class of *naualoztomeca*—the trader-spies who entered areas disguised as natives (Townsend 1992:188). Yet an underlying level of envy and distrust accompanied their prosperity and privilege.

A separate "foreign" class of long-distance traders lived in separate *calputin* or barrios within large Mesoamerican cities. The Aztec twin capital of Tlatelolco-Tenochtitlan had seven trading wards (Townsend 1992:186). The two largest trading barrios at Teotihuacan were home to merchants from the Gulf Coast (Rattray). The very name *pochteca*, deriving from *pochotl*, a tropical tree suggests non-native origins for this merchant class.

The plight of transplanted foreign merchants is often precarious. Frequently the subject of envy and suspicion, relegated to ethnic ghettos or persecuted as social scapegoats, their affluence comes at the cost of ridicule or even peril. In Western art such merchants are denigrated in searing satirical depictions, shown with ugly faces, exaggerated noses, lavishing shameless lust on wealth and women. Such disparaging images and underlying xenophobia accompany negative stereotypes of Chinese, Arab, Jewish, or Kashmiri merchants alike, intensifying in times of economic uncertainty. God L possibly reflects the Classic Maya unease in forming a "compact with the devil".

wealth built on dependence (and profits) of outsiders—embodied in the countenance of the seedy but enterprising merchant god.

We first see these figures in broad-brimmed hats on stelae from Cerro de las Mesas. Stela 4 from Tlalixcoyan, Cerro de las Mesa culture shows one such figure, presumably a ruler, seated, and carrying a fan. To his (her?) right is a square-cartouche day sign provisionally read as 5 Ehecatl. In another stela we also have figures in broad-brimmed hats in association with square cartouche day signs. Here our figures are shown conferring with one another. In these Middle Classic depictions the figure in the merchant hat is neither old nor ugly.

Figure 13.18 Cerro de las Mesas ST 4, Tlalixcoyon.

A figure in a broad-brimmed, bird-fronted hat accompanies a procession of long distance traders on two similar Rio Blanco bowls (Von Winning and Gutierrez Solana 1996 73-82). The figure is bearded, and like the earlier Cerro de las Mesas examples, we do not see him as especially old or unattractive. Lacking a load of goods, our man in the hat probably leads other merchants in the procession. They lean forward against walking sticks, carrying heavy bundles or backracks. Some of the *pochtun* carry smaller figures in their packs. Von Winning and Gutierrez Solana identify these as god images (ibid).

and indeed this is keeping with the idea that Veracruz traders promoted religious ideas along with luxury and subsistence goods.

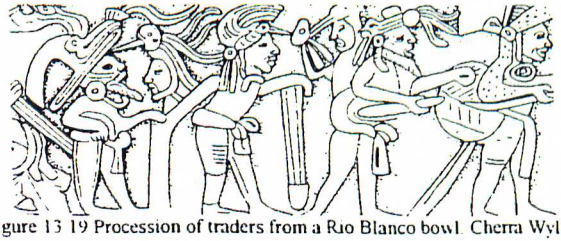


Figure 13.19 Procession of traders from a Rio Blanco bowl. Cherra Wyllie.

Together with the ballgame (see Von Winning and Gutierrez Solana 1996 Chapter 3), *Pochtun* ritual provides an important theme in Rio Blanco pottery. The two subjects—long distance trade and the ballgame—share certain ritual and iconographic elements, among them the presence of a bird deity, similar to the one who oversees the ceremonial decapitation on El Tajin's South Ballcourt panels. Music and dance also play a central role in both ritual practices.

Two Rio Blanco scenes offer us especially keen insights into Veracruz *pochtun* practices. The first bowl shows seven left-facing figures wearing woven armor and bird-fronted headdresses. They approach a right-facing figure offering them a bundle of reeds or feathers (possibly flaming bundles) in exchange for a beaded sash. In the upper portion of the bowl, just above the only crouching figure, we have two quatrefoils with interior signs, bar and dot numerals, and loops or tabs (discussed in Chapter 9). The crouching character is the only figure in this entourage dressed only in a loincloth. While Von Wining and Gutierrez Solana (1996 86) think that his posture is a compositional device allowing room for the hieroglyphs above him, my student Heather Galli suggests that he is a sacrificial victim. Galli relates this scene to later Aztec feast days and rituals associated with merchants. The first, recorded in Fray Diego Duran's *Book of the Gods*

and Rites and the Ancient Calendar (1971:187-205) describes a feast of knights and noblemen held on the day 4 Motion. During this feast, merchants offered slaves for sacrifice. Above the crouching figure, one of the quatrefoil-enclosed day sign holds an indistinguishable main sign. It has a numeral coefficient of four dots.

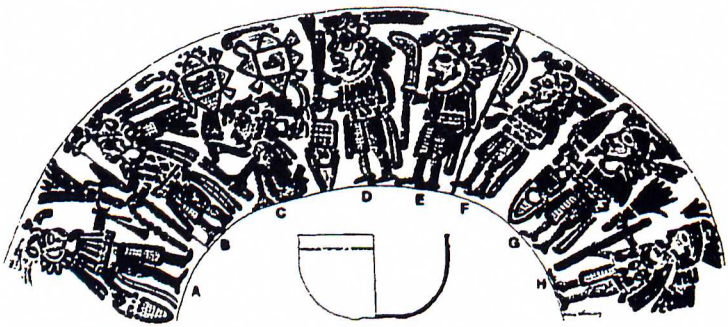


Figure 3.20 Rio Blanco bowl showing merchant ritual. Drawing by Hasso Von Winning.

A related story, connected with the merchant god Yiacatecutli, comes from Chapter 19, Book One of the Florentine Codex. This version describes great merchants who were like warriors. During their feast days they bathed slaves and sacrificed them to oblige their gods. Quilted armor, walking staffs, trade goods, and the interactions involving exchange each help in identifying these figures as great merchant warriors. They carry copal bags or pouches like those bearing symbols at El Tajin (see Chapter 10). Miller and Taube (1997:112) point out that ancient Maya merchants known as *p'olom* burned copal to Xaman Ek, the North Star, to ensure their safe journey.

Art historian Rex Koontz (2001) relates the scene on this bowl to other implements of power found in El Tajin narrative—

> "A procession of richly attired participants winds its way around the vase in a re-entrant composition to end with the figure at the far left of [the] roll-out drawing, who is receiving the group and must be considered the central ranking figure in the scene. The lead processant hands over a bunch of feathers and a beaded sash to this central

figure. These are the same two royal implements that are given to Thirteen Rabbit at the beginning of the Mound of the Building Columns narrative. A figure near the center of the composition carries a flaming bundle, an object which also appears throughout the accession sequence of Thirteen Rabbit and in a scene on the Structure Four Panel at Tajin."

Koontz notes that other Rio Blanco vases show similar scenes with supplicants offering flaming bundles.

Another important scene depicting a similar merchant ritual again shows seven figures in ritual procession facing an eighth. In contrast with the previous Rio Blanco vase, the main procession faces right rather than left. Ritual action takes place beneath a band of Venus stars and concentric U-shaped lunar symbols. Celestial symbols, bar and dot numerals, and hieroglyphs are interspersed above, between, and below the actors. Disembodied zoomorphs crowd the base of the bowl below the feet of most of the characters. Walking staffs and backracks connect the processants with long distance trade. Recall that Maya merchants prayed to a deity representing the North Star to guide them on their long journeys.

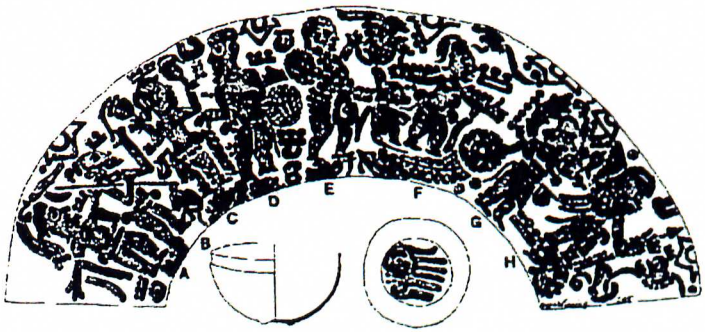


Figure 13.21 Rio Bowl showing a merchant ritual. Drawing by Hasso Von Winning.

Duran's description (1971: 204-209) of the Aztec feast of Xocotl Huetzi offers us a compelling account of a merchant celebration—

"On the same day the merchants offered up five slaves, four male and one female. All were washed and purified according to the ways and customes of cleaning slaves who were to represent gods. When these slaves had been presented and dedicated, one was given the name Yacatecuhtli [He Who Goes First]; another, Cuauhtlaxayauh [Eagle Face]' another, Coatlinahual [Weresnake]; and the woman was named Chalchlmecacihuatl [Lady of the Chalchalmec People?]. These were the names of the five deities adored, revered, and celebrated on this day by these people, together with Xocotl, [whom the slaves represented]. These five slaves impersonated them for twenty days, being honored as if they had been gods themselves...the [slaves] (who had been offered by the merchants, chieftans, and lords ten days before the feast) had been attired in the garb of the gods, those who were to be sacrificed by fire were consecrated....After dawn all those who were to be sacrificed were dressed in the garb and habit of the main gods, and according to seniority they were placed in a row next to the great fire. While they stood in that place a man appeared who bore the name the Fighter. One by one he bound their hands...they took the "gods" one by one...and cast them into the fire...This was called the Great Feast of the Dead."

The Aztecs devoted this feast to the gods Huehueteotl and Xiuhtecuhtli. Huehueteotl, the old Fire God, has a long tradition in Veracruz beginning in Early Classic Cerro de las Mesas (Miller and Taube 1993:93-94) and overlaps with Xiuhtecuhtli, who does not appear until Postclassic times. One of the figures on this bowl (as mentioned above) trails a fire serpent or *xiucoatl* attached to a shield-like solar symbol. The *xiucoatl* may refer to a new realm or creation obtained through sacrifice. These Fire Serpents surround the Aztec Calendar Stone or record of sequential creations and destructions (the Creation of Five Suns or epochs in total). Duran's account describes five gods or god-impersonators sacrificed by fire, and certainly many of the figures on the Rio Blanco vase appear to be wearing costumes of deities. There are also two animals taking part in the scene. They look like dogs. Xolotl, the spirit companion of Quetzalcoatl, is portrayed as a dog who lives in the Underworld retrieving bones of the dead. By some accounts Xolotl took part in the Aztec creation of the Fifth Sun at Teotihuacan, where the gods jumped into a burning cauldron. The sacrifice of the gods by fire gave momentum to the otherwise stagnant world

Figure 13.22 Huehueteotl sculpture, Cerro de las Mesas.

The next part of Duran's account makes this interpretation even more persuasive—

> "Once these offerings had ending, at evening the youths and maidens came out of their cloisters in the Great Temple . [the young girls and boys] were well garbed and highly adorned .to the sound of a drum they danced . To this dance came all the high lords, splendidly arrayed, and these formed a circle with much pomp and majesty . The leader of the dance, who stood in front of the others, was dressed according to the native fashion. This god was disguised as a bird or bat, its wings and crest made of large and splendid feathers. From his wrists and ankles hung large gold bells; in both hands he carried native rattles. He made much noise and clamour with these rattles and with his own mouth. . . "

We see one of the figures in the procession playing rattles, while another (wearing a turtle carapace) plays a Y-shaped instrument. Perhaps the most animated figure is a bird impersonator, mouth open, arms outstretched. Feathers sprout from her arms, and a loop or cord dangles from her wrist on one side. We find this bird deity on a number of Rio Blanco bowls. She is always shown arms out at either side of her body, naked from the waist up, with one breast visible in profile. Here she stands above the Fire Serpent, the companion Xolotl directly behind her

On relief panels from Tajin South Ballcourt a figure in bird costume, arms energetically outstretched, stands above a sacrificial victim, while attendants on either

side play musical instruments, a rattle and drum respectively. A similar figure in bird costume from the central column of the Mound of the Building Columns gestures with tremendous energy. Rex Kootnz (Koontz nd) believes that the animated pose, along with the common association of musicians in these scenes suggests that our bird impersonator is a dancer, his identity the Principle Bird Deity who first appears at Izapa.

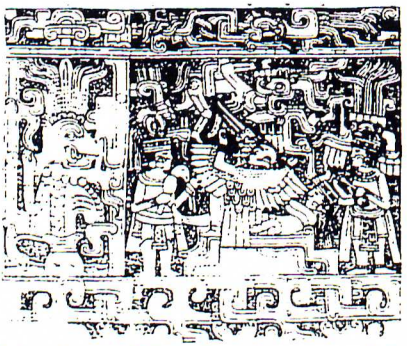


Figure 13.23 Bird deity on El Tajin South Ballcourt panel. Kampen 1972.

The Late Postclassic Maya called this deity Seven Macaw. In the Quiche story of creation, the Popul Vuh, Seven Macaw is the adversarial false sun of the underworld, who challenges the Maya Hero Twins in a ballgame at the onset of time. Like the Patron of Merchants, God L, the Maya never show the underworld bird deity in a particularly flattering light. These disparaging undertones possibly reflect a deeper political reality; rivalry perhaps

We know that at the time of the Conquest, there were several regional interpretations of underlying mythology included in creation stories and migration tales. Each town had its own patron deity. The pantheon shifted emphasis from place to place The physical attributes, personalities, and perhaps even the gender of the gods had unique

manifestations in any given region. Aztec warfare symbolized a metaphoric battle for supremacy played out by the patron deities of each culture or region.

In the art of Izapa and Classic Veracruz the Bird Deity appears to hold a different position with the mythological framework than that conveyed by either the Kiche *Popol Vuh* or the Classic Maya polychrome vases. We can only guess at the implications of battles performed in the arena of such legends.

Duran's account links the bird dancer with the Aztec *Veintena* festival. Aztec creation accounts underlie the feast, and the Rio Blanco bowl offers references to both aspects of Xocotl Huetzi—bird dancers and creation. Rex Koontz associates a scene from the Mound of the Building Columns at El Tajin with the blowgun shooting of Seven Macaw by the Hero Twins of the Popul Vuh (Koontz 2001 [Robiscek and Hales 1982.56-57, Tedlock 1996 78; Coe 1989 169-170; Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993 70-71) Seven Macaw is the false sun. When the Maya hero-ballplayers shoot him down from the top of the World Tree they bring momentum to an otherwise stagnant world (Schele and Freidel) Recall that this is essentially the outcome of the gods' sacrifice at Teotihuacan the inert world is given movement. In another parallel aspect to the Maya and Aztec creation stories Tecuciztecatl rises in the sky as the false sun, whereupon the angered gods hurl a rabbit against his surface, to dull his glare. Thus, Tecuciztecatl shares the fate of Seven Macaw; he is toppled from prominence, no longer able to continue his gaudy charade. Ethnohistoric evidence suggests that the Maya creation sequence was danced in public ritual (Koontz 2001 [Carmack and Mondloch 1982.191, Coe 1989 161-162])

This juxtaposition of two seemingly disparate creation stories continues in Duran's account of Xocotl Huetzi--

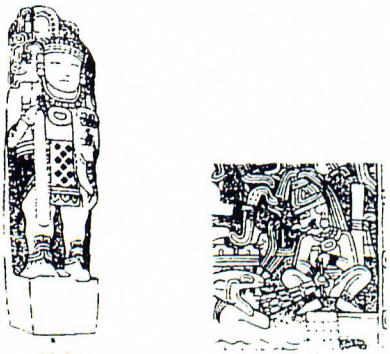
"The dance ended one hour before sunset, and all the youths and maidens who had participated cast off the feathers and adornments in which they had danced and came to the contest to see who could climb the pole the fastest...youths forming, stripping, placing themselves in order, and climbing the pole. They were not worthless or lowly boys—all of them were sons of chieftains, skillful, courageous, and nimble, [eager to] prove themselves in the game of Xocotl...to see whether the god granted them good fortune...the signal was given, and then they dashed for the pole...[the victors] descended for their prize..they were conducted to the chambers...they remained cloistered there for four days..they went to bathe to be purified...When those youths had finished, axmen appeared and chopped the pole to the ground...he who did not carry away a small or large part of the pole..thought himself very unfortunate. With this we are finished with the feast of Xocotl Huetzi, and thus ends our description of the festivities of the highest male deities...Though they were gods, they were also [calendrical] signs, and they ruled governed and measured time."

That role of merchants underlies these events is made manifest in the accoutrements of long distance trade. We are reminded that events take place in the celestial realm of the night sky—the guiding bodies offering navigational and orienteering points along the trade corridor. Costume elements also indicate the vast expanse covered by Veracruz-dominated long distance trade routes. For example, several of the characters on Rio Blanco bowls wear a shell pendant (Figure 13.21) identified by Peter Selversone (personal communication) as a cross-section of a limpet, probably *Ancistromesus mexicana.*

Artisans cut the Mexican limpet to form an oval-shaped ring that was then drilled with two holes, laced with a chord, and worn around the neck with the shell oriented sideways. Although the limpet shell ornament appears frequently in Classic Gulf Coast iconography, this type of shell is only found on the west coast of Mexico, north of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (Wirth 2001; Peter Selverstone: personal communication)

In north-central Veracruz at El Tajin, the figure on Pyramid of the Niches Sculpture 1 wears precisely this type of shell ornament. He carries a copal bag. His strange webbed feet resemble those of the figure facing the musical procession and bird

dancer on the Rio Blanco bowl. Underworld deities portrayed on the Tajin South Ballcourt also wear the shell. Meanwhile, in southern Veracruz we see the limpet pendant on a female figurine from Nopiloa as well as Rio Blanco pottery. Selverstone notes that this imagery is entirely absent in Classic Maya iconography, even though the shell itself shows up in Early Classic burial contexts.



13.24a 13.24b

Figure 13.24 El Tajin figures wearing the limpet shell ornament.

Another accessory associated with long distance trade is a long curved-ended instrument, which looks like a hockey stick. It may in fact be a piece of ball game equipment. Scenes on the Tetitla murals at Teotihuacan show the ball game played with a similar type of stick. One of our Rio Blanco *pochtun* carries this merchant-associated hockey stick.

Throughout El Tajin, we see a comparable object, hooked on one or both ends. A person or deity holds the staff, placing it against the head or body of another actor in the narrative. Like a wand or royal crook, it appears to bless or sanctify persons or events.

Veracruz merchant iconography has clear correlates on Seibal Stelae and Pabellon imagery. Many of the barrel-shaped Pabellon Molded-carved vases show paired figures wearing broad-brimmed hats. Facing one another, they wear backracks. Their aging faces indicate that they may represent God L, the ancient Maya god of merchants. We find an excavated example of this vase from Seibal.

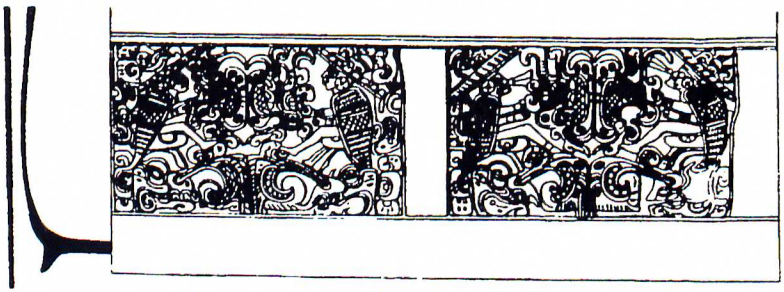


Figure 13.25 Pabellon vase excavated from Seibal (Sabloff) showing merchants.

A figure found on Pabellon bowls wears the limpet shell pendant. Shown partially reclining, he carries an atalat'l. Located between this figure and another facing him is a bird, possibly a hieroglyph. Another character wearing a limpet-shell pendant appears on a Pabellon vase from Waxactun. Recall that Selverstone does not find the limpet shell ornament in Classic Maya iconography.

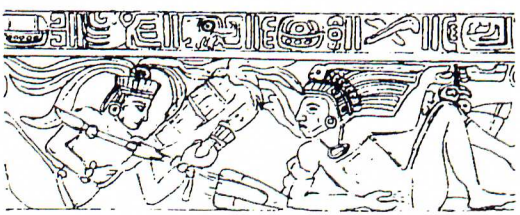
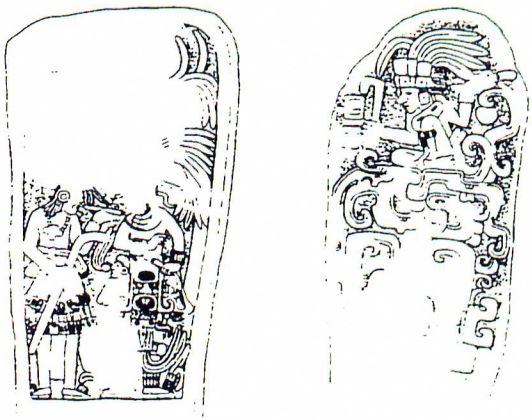


Figure 13.26 Detail from a Pabellon bowl with figure wearing limpet shell. Cherra Wyllie.

On Seibal Stela 17 a mustached character with non-Classic hairstyle and costume elements carries the ceremonial hockey stick. He puffs on a cigar, conferring with a ruler

in resplendent dress, who carries the God K Mannekin Scepter of Maya rulership. The hairdo and jade bead necklace of the man with the hockey stick are similar to the snake skirted figure on Seibal Stela 13, as well as the main subject of imagery on certain Pabellon bowls.



13.27a 13.27b

Figure 13.27 Characters carrying hockey-stick scepters. Seibal ST 17 (13.27a) and Seibal ST 3 (13.27b).

A crouching figure on Seibal Stela 3 wields a shorter scepter, like the ones from El Tajin. He places the object over a square cartouche day sign, which begins a sequent calendar round date. Bunched feathered or flaming bundles, like those identified from El Tajin and on Rio Blanco pottery, also appear on Pabellon wares, where they are placed on, alongside, or above inscriptions or objects, emphasizing key texts, dates, or events.

The importation of gods, merchant iconography, square cartouche day signs, and molded-carved fine paste wares attests to undeniable southern Veracruz influence within the Maya region. These "foreign" attributes are well documented in the archaeological literature of Seibal and Altar de Sacrificios—two sites where signs of this presence are especially abundant. In 1970, Sabloff compiled a list of distinctive traits common to

Seibal Tenth Cycle monuments and Pabellon Molded-carved Fine Orange ceramics. In 1973, Adams expanded this list, noting those traits not present in Classic Maya iconography.

Figure 13.28 Figure on Rio Blanco vase carrying hockey stick scepter.

Distinctive costume elements from this list also found in Veracruz Classic contexts as well as Classic Maya contexts include:

1 Headdresses with long plumes (Rio Blanco; El Tajin).
2 Round earplugs (Rio Blanco)
3 Bead necklaces (Rio Blanco)
4 Cotton quilted armour (Rio Blanco)
5 Mask worn in front of the face
6 Broad brimmed hats
7 Apron style loincloth (Rio Blanco)
8 Ladder bracelet
9 Nose bar (possibly at El Tajin)

In Classic Veraruz art we see the following costume elements noted by Adams as distinctive features on "non-Classic" Seibal stelae and Pabellon Molded-carved ceramics but which are *not found* in Classic Maya contexts:

1 Helmet (El Tajin, Pyramid of the Niches Panel 1)
2 Arm and leg bracelets (Rio Blanco)
3 Loincloth (Rio Blanco, El Tajin)
4 Girdle
5 Bar with three tassels worn across the chest (at El Tajin figures wear a similar, although not identical ornament).

One of Adams' listed traits is *Physical Characteristics*, a vague term at best.

The following physical properties in the Sabloff-Adams list are common to figures in Pabellon-Seibal iconography, and which also occur in the art of Classic Veracruz—

1. Beard (Rio Blanco—discussed above)
2. Faces with mouths slightly open (Rio Blanco)
3. Faces with mouths closed
4. Brushed up hairstyle
5. Barefeet (Rio Blanco; El Tajin)

These Seibal-Pabellon accessories also occur in Classic Veracruz iconography—

1. Distinctive staff (Rio Blanco—discussed above)
2. Dart[s] (El Tajin)
3. Atalatl (El Tajin)
4. Stylized wall or shield symbol (El Tajin)

Other diagnostic traits noted by Sabloff and Adams present in Veracruz iconography include square cartouche day signs (discussed at greater length in Chapter 9), the use of serpent body platforms (these take a somewhat different form in Rio Blanco ceramics), and earth monster seats. Bilateral symmetry and scenes showing figures in conference also occur in Classic Veracruz iconography.

Over half of the traits compiled individually and collectively by Sabloff and Adams are common to Classic Veracruz narrative pictorial traditions. These traits are in addition to shared gods, blood serpents, ambassadorial fans, and wearing of the limpet shell ornament. The evidence for Veracruz influence is clear. This having been said, the evidence for new rule or population replacement by people of Veracruz is not at all clear.

Like earlier Classic Maya prototypes, the iconography of late stelae from Seibal and related sites features portraits of individual rulers. We know from public proclamations at La Mojarra and Cerro de las Mesas that early in southern Veracruz history Mixe-Zoqueans shared this trend. This changes during the Late Classic, with Veracruz artists focusing on narrative rather than portraiture. Even at El Tajin, we see Thirteen Rabbit as

one of many characters participating in sequential events. The theatre of ritual—whether performed by elites or mythological figures—becomes the preferred theme of public art. This extends to Rio Blanco ceramic imagery, where ritual activity is played out upon the vessel surface. By contrast, Pabellon Molded-carved bowls and vases seem nearly stagnant. They feature individual or paired elites or deities. Rather than the energetic re-entrant compositions on Rio Blanco bowls teeming with animated figures, Pabellon vessels show two scenes, separated by vertical frames or hieroglyphic columns. The format itself—the horizontal and vertical glyph bands, so like the Classic Maya PSS and SSS-- has no parallel in Veracruz ceramics from any period.

Figures portrayed on Pabellon ceramics also reference Maya deities, in addition to Veracruz ones. Recall that the recumbent ruler emitting flowery speech has a hairdo identifying him with the Classic Maya Maize God. The posture itself is a Maya Terminal Classic invention, with no analogous Veracruz examples.

During the 5th *Congreso Internacional de Mayistas* held in Xalapa, Veracruz (2001), scholars noted several traits shared by the Classic Veracruz and the Maya. The conference focused on relationships between the Maya area and Gulf Coast. Mexican iconographer Sara Ladron de Guevara (who examined Maya elements in the El Tajin art) sees connections between nobles with crossed arms depicted at the Mound of the Building Columns at El Tajin and those at Tonina, and the Death God on Tajin's South Ballcourt with a similar Death God at Tonina. Ladron de Guevara also feels that the blue figure painted at Building I has counterparts in Maya painting programs. She additionally

observes the important relationships between skulls, decapitation, and serpent iconography in both regions.

Beyond iconography, archaeologists observe similar elements in Maya and El Tajin architecture. Hector Cuevas Fernandez notes the use of columns at Chichen Itza and Ake compared with those from the Mound of the Building Columns, *grecas* at Tajin Chico and in the Puuk architecture of northern Yucatan, the use of the false arch in Tajin and the Maya region, and ballcourt design and relief carvings in both areas. Lourdes Aquino Rodriguez and Jaime Ortega Guevara see corresponding burial practices in the Gulf Coast and the Maya regions during the Terminal Classic period.

Veracruz influence carried with it different characteristics in its dispersal throughout the Maya lowlands. We might expect this, since even during the apogee of Classic Maya civilization we see a breadth of form and style in art and architecture. From Palenque to Copan, the art of the Maya was extremely varied. Sites that emerged after the Classic fall, such as Chichen Itza and Seibal, were undoubtedly more receptive to outside influence than their cultural forbearers. Such receptivity was by no means uniform. Permutations of varying quantities of Maya and southern Veracruz elements combine at the Terminal Classic Maya sites of Seibal, Chichen Itza, and Cotzumalhuapa creating forms both oddly similar and strangely idiosyncratic. We see Veracruz iconography incorporated on a wide scale, while Veracruz hieroglyphs such as day signs, and ceramic types, are only assimilated within a limited range.

In the next chapter, I examine the mechanism of trade in spreading goods and ideas, reconstructing the increasing power and influence of Veracruz long distance

traders. Yet, regardless of the precise players and processes, manifestations of a new dynamic are discernable. Thompson (1970) called these people the Putun or Chontal Maya. Other scholars refer to them as the Itza (Ball and Taschek 1989; Kowalski 1989) For decades, scholars have noted the undeniable presence of mysterious outsiders whose imprint characterizes the final phases of the Mesoamerican Classic. Their imitable style and iconography of power indicate their vast sway. As we shall see, this clout carried a new wave of religious fervor throughout Mesoamerica, as the images of great kings toppled with the undulating movement of the Feathered Serpent.

Chapter Fourteen
Signs and Symbols of Gulf Coast Trade: A Reconstruction

The Late Classic-Early Postclassic transition heralds a time of intensified interactions between Veracruz and the world of the ancient Maya. Evidence for this exchange survives in ceramics materials and modes of production, the distribution of ballgame paraphernalia, and a shared symbolic vocabulary manifest in hieroglyphs and iconography. These rich threads form a colorful matrix of recurrent themes and materials. Yet only in panning the lens back can we see the tapestry of historic process in all its splendor. Admittedly, pieces of the tapestry are worn, frayed, or missing, rent by the ravages of time. Likewise, we view the past through the filter of present realities, culture, and perceptions. In the following pages I offer my reconstruction of the social processes underlying the spread of the symbols and ideas contained in this study; a journey into the past as seen through insights provided by observations, perceptions, and imagination

Without the courage to stretch our imaginations there is no science, for science—physical *and* social--compels us to perceive the world beyond what is immediately observable, to think "outside the box." This is certainly *not* to say that our visions and ideas should not be the subject of intense scrutiny—they should. Yet surviving material remains are our only time machine into the past.

Throughout my research, two recurrent themes surfaced again and again: 1) The role of southern Veracruz in long distance trade and 2) The importance of ballgame ritual as an ideological component of that trade. In the section that follows I offer evidence and explanations for how that ancient economic system developed and flourished. I suggest that regional beliefs and practices incubated during the Formative Period, including those

associated with Quetzalcoatl and the rubber ballgame, were revitalized in the last stages of the Classic Period when Gulf Coast traders regained jurisdiction over their own resources; that, once regained, these traders exported cultural practices and religious values in order to reinforce economic ties. During the Late Classic to Early Postclassic periods, southern Veracruz was again the hub of the greater Mesoamerican interaction sphere.

Formative Period Origins

Gulf Coast trade networks provided corridors for the spread of religious ideas. These ideas formed the underpinnings of a pan-Mesoamerican cosmological structure articulated through recognizable signs and symbols. Perhaps the best known deity of the Veracruz-Olmec is the Feathered Serpent, whom the later Mexica called Quetzalcoatl.

Quetzalcoatl as both Feathered Serpent and in his alternate guise as Ehecatl, the embodiment of wind, each makes his appearance in the Veracruz-Tabasco coastal plain during the Formative Period. The Feathered Serpent is essentially a god of the geographical and cultural Olmec heartland. As such, it is both an intricate part of the Gulf Coast religious system and a pan-Mesoamerican trait spawned from this ancient *Cultura Madre*.

Karl Taube (1996) and Michael Coe (1973) each trace the origins of the Avian Serpent to the Early Formative Olmec. One of their numerous supporting examples comes from La Venta Monument 19. As mentioned in Chapter 8, this carving offers epigraphic reinforcement to Feathered Serpent iconography (Taube 1996:87). Here during the Formative we have examples of the Feathered Serpent in the same southern

Veracruz-Tabasco geographic region that is to play a key role in the economic and ideological configuration of the Late Classic-Early Postclassic transition.

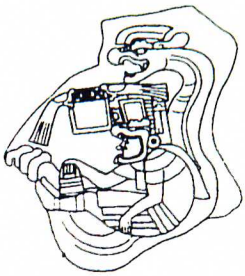


Figure 14.1 Olmec Feathered Serpent iconography. Taube 1996. Coe 1973

Meanwhile, in north-central Veracruz, we witness the first appearance of iconography connected with Ehecatl. At the Formative Period site of Santa Luisa, archaeologist Jeffrey Wilkerson found an *ehecatcoxcatl*, or wind jewel, on ceramics dating to 1000 B C E. (Wilkerson 1989:104). The *ehecatcoxcatl*, a sliced conch shell, is worn as the principle insignia of the wind god. Ehecatl's diagnostic attributes retain strong northern Veracruz associations. We see them in the ballcourt panels of El Tajin during the Terminal Classic period (Wilkerson 1984.125 and 1980:219) and as a recurrent theme in Postclassic Huastec sculpture. This geographic association is consistent with ethnohistoric accounts of Ehecatl as a "Huastec" god (Ekholm 1973:44, Nicholson 1973:83).

Figure 14.2 Huastec figure wearing an *ehecatcoxcatl*.

What were to become dual manifestations of the Feathered Serpent complex were components of a greater religious and ideological system disseminated through Mesoamerica's first recognizable stylistic horizon. The underlying mechanism was trade. Primacy of Gulf Coast resources is underscored by numerous Mixe-Zoquean loan words for early cultigens such as *chayote, huisquil, cima* (goard), *koya* (tomato), as well as terms for luxury items such as cacao (*kakawa*) and copal *(pom)*, which find their way into lowland Mayan languages (Justeson, et al. 1985:23-24).

It should be noted here that Veracruz was comprised of distinct cultural and ethnic zones, the parameters of which shifted through time as migrations of new populations moved in and out of the region, constantly transforming the cultural mosaic. All Veracruz traders were not "Olmec;" indeed, as far back as the Formative Period, the cultural attributes of northern Veracruz appear to have been distinctive from those in the south (see Daneels; Wilkerson 1973, and Von Winning 1996:9-13). This is particularly germane to a discussion of deities. The properties of the Feathered Serpent, for example, appear to be the outgrowth of at least two distinct traditions: that of the Avian Serpent in the Olmec-dominated south and Ehecatl in the north.

The Classic Period (Before the Fall of Teotihuacan)

During the Classic Period, the Feathered Serpent is amalgamated into the Teotihuacan pantheon as a minor deity. Feathered Serpent and Ehecatl iconography retain reference to coastal origins as seen on the Temple of Quetzalcoatl. Here we see shells and marine life in conjunction with depictions of the Feathered Serpent; a fusion of traits associated with a broader "Gulf Coast" identity—the formation of what was to become the Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl complex. By absorbing and reconfiguring Gulf Coast symbols of power, Teotihuacan installs itself as the inheritor of recognizable Mesoamerican authority established by the Olmecs. Teotihuacan further consolidates this position, gaining principal control of coastal resources.

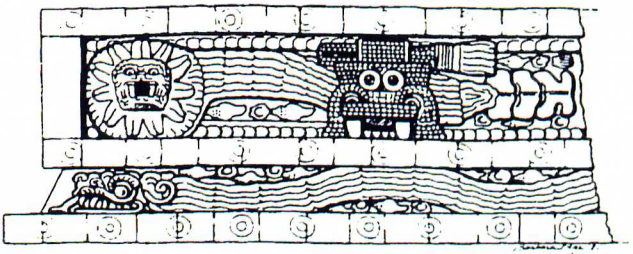


Figure 14.3 Temple of the Feathered Serpent, Teotihuacan with marine shell imagery.

The major foreign presence at Teotihuacan was by people of Gulf Coast origins, reputedly merchants (Millon 1991:127; Rattray 1984). This larger group populated two separate ethnic barrios, leaving behind the highest concentration of foreign ceramics at that city (Millon 1991:126; Rattray 1984). "*Physiochemical characterization has established that most foreign pottery present at Teotihuacan itself came from the Gulf Coast, implying strong mutual or dual directional commercial relationships between the two regions*" (Santley 1989:145 [Rattray]). At one of these Gulf Coast barrios, Rattray

excavated round structures (ibid). Round temples increase in frequency beginning in the Late Classic period and are generally linked with Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl manifested as coiled serpent, a conch shell interior, or the swirling forces of the wind.

Stylistic elements also connect Teotihuacan with the Gulf Coast. Interlaces, scrollwork, and double outlines, diagnostic markers for later "Classic Veracruz style" are found in isolated context. These include: 1) an early buried platform "painted with roundels, frame, and interlocking scrolls" (Kubler 1985:278) at Subterraneos near the Pyramid of the Moon Plaza, 2) decoration on mold-impressed ware with complex interlocking figure-ground patterns, which presage design elements on Gulf-associated molded-carved pottery vessels (Von Winning and Guiterrez Solana 1996:17-27) and 3) the "Tajin-style" ballcourt marker found at La Ventilla (Miller 1986:72). However, it should be noted that there is far more evidence that these stylistic traits originated on the Guatemala Pacific coast, disseminating north through Early Classic trade routes. Although the style as defined by Proskouriakoff aptly characterized the Veracruz art style of the Late Classic period, it proliferates at Izapa and Kaminaljuyu well before that time.

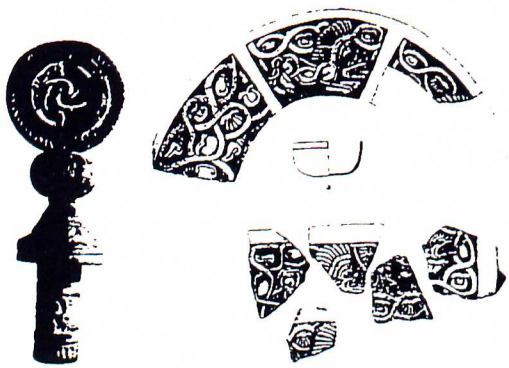


Figure 14.4 Teotihuacan objects related to Veracruz style. 14.4a Tepantitla Ballcourt marker.14.4b Molded carved ware.

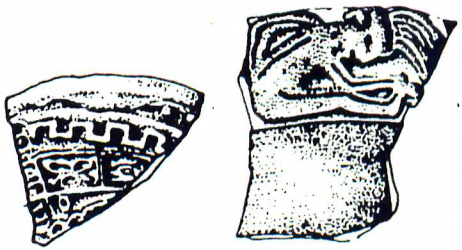


Figure 14.5 Teotihuacan Molded-carved ceramics illustrated by Evelyn Rattray

Ballgame references make possible allusions to Gulf Coast practices. Ballcourts and ballplaying are depicted on the Tepantitla murals, yet there are no known ballcourts at Teotihuacan (Ringle et al 1998:196). The ballgame is yet another Olmec derivation, and rubber a Gulf Coast commodity so identified with that region that we refer to the people of the Formative heartland as the "Rubber People" or Olmec. Yet the absence of ballcourts at Teotihuacan suggests that this commodity was not in high demand. We might also assume that Teotihuacan-dominated trade did little to promote ballplaying as a major Mesoamerican pastime. Again, we must temper our perceptions of "Gulf Coast" origins with existing evidence from the Pacific Coast. Recall that Tiquisate pottery from Escuintla is laden with Teotihuacan symbolism, as well as ballgame decapitation scenes. The association suggests an Early to Middle Classic date for these tripod vessels. If this is accurate, then we must assume that the origin of the ballgame cult, so prevalent during the Late to Terminal Classic Period and so ubiquitous in Veracruz during that time, originated on the Pacific coast. Teotihuacan influence is so dominant during this period, that it frequently eclipses our understanding of other relations and interactions.

According to Robert Santley (1989:131-151), the Teotihuacan enclave of Matacapan on the southern Gulf Coast served as a processing site for obsidian during the Early Classic. As a key thoroughfare linking coastal resources with Central Mexico,

Oaxaca, and the Maya areas, this was a strategic location for economic exchange. Yet, at nearby sites such as Cerro de las Mesas, Teotihuacan materials are present, while not prominent. There is no consensus between scholars on the degree to which Teotihuacan held sway in the Gulf lowlands (Santley and Pool 1993; Stark 1990; Stark and Arnold 1997; Yarborough 1992)

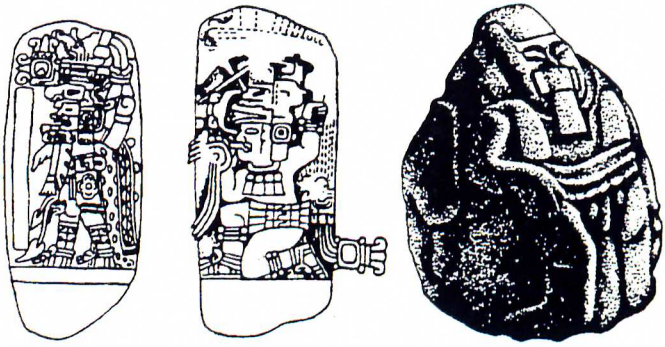
It appears that the Gulf Coast people occupied a privileged position within the greater cosmopolitan city and horizon of Teotihuacan. Teotihuacan imported their goods and absorbed many of their cultural and stylistic traits, while in their eastern homelands they enjoyed virtual autonomy apart from rare economic staging areas. Still, Teotihuacan dominated the balance of power in ancient Mesaomerica and even after its descent no rising power could fully escape its formidable shadow

Veracruz During the Classic Period

Dimensions of Classic civilization in Veracruz remain something of an enigma Wilkerson assigns the substantial-sized Central Veracruz site of El Pital to the Early Classic Period, based largely on a surface survey of the yet to be excavated site. El Pital matches Teotihuacan in scale if not temporality, with both sites supported by raised field agriculture (Wilkerson 1997). Full-scale archaeology at the site will undoubtedly transform our understanding of both ancient Veracruz history and the whole of Mesoamerican interactions. In the meantime, further commentary seems premature.

During the Early Classic Period we see both Ehecatl and the Feathered Serpent actively incorporated into relief carved monumental sculpture at Cerro de las Mesas. Figures on Cerro de las Mesas Stela 3 and Stela 9 each wear Buccal masks, a diagnostic trait associated with Ehecatl, the wind god, who later becomes a manifestation of the

Aztec deity Quetzalcoatl. Ehecatl's beak-like mask resembles a duck bill, the prototype from which the mask probably derives (Miller and Taube 1993). Cerro de las Mesas Monument 5 is a sculpture-in-the-round of a broad-bodied creature wearing a duck-billed mask. The resemblance of this work to the duck figured Tuxtla Statuette (CE 162) is unmistakable (Miller 1991).



14.6a 14.6b 14.6c

Figure 14.6 Cerro de las Mesas sculpture showing figures wearing Ehecatl masks: ST 3 (14.6a), ST 9 (14.6b), and Monument 5 (14.6c).

The Duck God of Veracruz origin was likely an autonomous deity, which later came to be incorporated into the pan-Mesoamerican Feathered Serpent complex. Principal figures with webbed duck-like feet feature prominently in Late Classic Veracruz art, such as Pyramid of the Niches Sculpture 1 from El Tajin and the prominent figure on a ritual scene acted out on Rio Blanco ceramics. Symbols associated with the Feathered Serpent accompany Cerro de las Mesas Stela 5. Occurrences of Ehecatl and Feathered Serpent symbolism at Cerro de las Mesas provide graphic evidence that, throughout the Classic Period, the people of southern Gulf Coast continued worshiping the same Veracruz-origin deities established during the Formative Period. While Teotihuacan influence is detectable (as in Cerro de las Mesas Stela 15), such influence

never dominates the style, iconography, or inscriptions. Style and content of the sculpture mirrors the archaeological data: Teotihuacan's presence, while perceptible, is not dominant. Like their Maya neighbors to the south, the people of the Gulf Coast were receptive to Teotihuacan, but such receptivity did not eclipse their cultural autonomy. In the case of Veracruz the attributes of the civilization not only survived, they flourished.

After the Fall of Teotihuacan

The Gulf Coast was the last foreign commercial tie with Teotihuacan. According to Santley (Santley 1989; Santley and Pool 1993), Veracruz trade continued to flourish at Matacapan and throughout the Gulf Coast after the fall of Teotihuacan. Local entrepreneurs now assumed a full monopoly rather than a subsidiary role. This shift in economic power has been recognized as the ascendancy of a merchant group alternately called the Putun, Itza, Olmeca-Xicalanca, the Chontal, or the people of Acalan (Rice: 334-335, Robles and Andrews: 83; Ball and Taschek: 188; Kowalski 1989). While lacking a type-site, the region of southern Veracruz and Tabsco and into Campeche is generally identified as its geographic source; in other words the former Olmec heartland.

While Thompson's Putun hypothesis is now largely rejected, it cannot be denied that the dynamics of trade radically shift during this period. The weight of evidence suggests that these traders are from Veracruz. Virtually every important Epiclassic center has artifacts of Gulf Coast origin, manufacture, or imitation; often in unusually high concentration. For example, elements of Maya and Teotihuacan iconography are integral to the eclectic art styles of Xochicalco and Cacaxtla in central Mexico; nevertheless, at both sites Veracruz was a principal trading partner (Nagao 1989:98; Crespo et al:236), *not*, as one might expect, the Late Classic Maya or Teotihuacan. During the Late-

Terminal Classic we also see widespread evidence of Gulf Coast trade at such sites as Cholula (Millon:134), Lambityeco, Monte Alban (Diehl: 289-290), Chichen Itza (Lincoln), and Quirigua (Sharer: 251), Veracruz *pochteca* were very likely the arbitrators through which diverse ingredients of Mesoamerican culture were filtered and distributed.

I believe that the mechanisms of this trade involved two stages: the first just after the fall of Teotihuacan, and the second following the collapse of the great Maya Classic centers.

After the Fall: Phase One

In the aftermath of Teotihuacan's hegemony we can envision a scenario comparable to the Fall of Rome in the Old World—one of persistent memory characterized by revival movements. Each ascending power claimed legitimate inheritance. In the wake of formidable, over-arching powers the ensuing polities selectively choose referential elements, not necessarily using their original contexts or meaning (recall the old saying--"*the Holy Roman Empire was neither Holy nor Roman nor an Empire*"). Likewise, Late Classic centers frequently made use of Teotihuacan iconography and symbolism, with each region using these symbols in unique configurations and contexts. Therefore, consistency of symbol (or symbolic elements) does not necessarily imply consistency of meaning.

We see such appropriations in the crowns worn by Xochicalco-culture kings and queens depicted on monumental sculpture. Their trapeze-and-ray tiaras suggest that they are the rightful inheritors of the power and the glory that was Teotihuacan. While the year sign is undoubtedly of Teotihuacan origin, there are no Teotihuacan ruler portraits, and

the symbol is never used as a crown at that site. Yet, the Xochicalco artists offer an *homage* to various elements of Mesoamerican cultural greatness.

Figure 14.7 Xochicalco culture rulers wearing the Teotihuacan trapeze and ray sign. Left from Maltrata, right from the Temple of the Faethered Serpent at Xochicalco.

Because of these Teotihuacan insertions, it becomes difficult to place non-provenienced objects in proper chronological sequence. Within this study, for example, I include certain objects with Teotihuacan iconography that I nevertheless find troubling. These include Cerro de las Mesas Stela 15 and the so-called "Escuintla hoards." Stela 15 has square cartouche day signs generally found in *Late* Classic context. Apart from Tiquisate pottery we find ballgame decapitation scenes exclusively in Late or Terminal Classic contexts. Does this mean that the associated Teotihuacan iconography is retrospective? How confidently can we date any object on the basis of style? These questions are even more pertinent when we consider that the Late Postclassic Aztecs produced Teotihuacan masks and Maya-style *chacmools*. When is a Greek statue a Greek statue?

During the late Eighth Century, Maya wall paintings focus on ostentatious wealth and conspicuous consumption. Scenes of goods and trade on codex-style vases and wall paintings, like those at Bonampak and Cacaxtla, lead us to believe that Late Classic Maya ideas and symbolic currency were exported by a special class of traders and merchants To this end, Veracruz *pochteca* fulfilled a function similar to their role within the Teotihuacan interaction sphere. The difference is that these traders simultaneously

transmitted their own symbolic currency and belief system. We see this in the near-evangelical spread of Feathered Serpent iconography throughout Mesoamerica.

Judging by the spread of Classic Maya symbol and style well beyond its homeland, Veracruz traders served as intercessors exporting aspects of Maya culture. Skilled Maya artists may have accompanied them (Magaloni; Miller 1999). Yet the ceramic evidence does not indicate a strong Maya presence where Maya artistic style is most evident (as at Xochicalco and Cacaxtla). Since we *do* have ceramic evidence at these sites coming out of Veracruz, we might assume that these long distance traders ferried perishable items between the Mexican highlands and the Central American tropics, along with their own exports of chocolate, vanilla, and rubber. The "people as pots" approach has obvious limitations. What seems apparent is that after the fall of Teotihuacan, the Maya have clout. As their wealth increases, so too their bureaucracy, their petty rivalries. In the swansong of the culture, however, the splendor of their artistic achievement surpasses any civilization in the ancient Americas.

We know that in earlier times the Maya wore Teotihuacan symbols as high status markers. We can only imagine what it must have been like for the Maya when for a brief period, they too represented the hub of wealth and power; when the guild of long distance merchants, once given the charge of exporting the Central Mexican way of life, worked on *their* behalf.

It is during this apogee of Maya civilization at the sites of Xochicalco and Cacaxtla, that we see conscious references to the Classic Maya: the linear texts on carved stelae, the style and content of wall paintings, or the posture of seated rulers, so reminiscent of those on Altar Q from Copan. These pictorial scenes are stamped with

additional references to the former grandeur of Teotihuacan. Yet subtle Gulf Coast symbolism undulates throughout these emblem-laden programs.

The Feathered Serpent was a Teotihuacan referent, while simultaneously entrenched in the mythic memory of Veracruz-Tabasco. As a Gulf Coast deity, I believe it served as the religious core of a revitalization movement; an ideological message intricately tied to its economic base. Power-laden elements were recombined to provide a newly invigorated and historically-sanctioned faith.

Figure 14 8 Scene from Terminal Classic Chichen Itza showing Long Distance trade.

After the Fall: Phase Two

The power base of what Ball and Taschek refer to as "mercantile imperialism" is thought to have been centered in the southern Veracruz-Tabasco region, with strong ties to Tajin and related sites to the north. After the Classic Maya collapse, emerging centers of power, most notably at Chichen Itza and Seibal, apparently formed economic alliances

with newly empowered Gulf Coast merchants. The presence of two or more contemporaneous writing systems, and the fusion of art and architectural styles seem to support this position. Terminal Classic Maya iconography continues to highlight the important function of long-distance trade, such as canoes and load-bearing merchants featured in the wall paintings of the Temple of the Warriors at Chichen Itza, or the traders in the act of negotiation depicted on Pabellon Molded-carved vases.

The Feathered Serpent, reintroduced throughout Mesoamerica in the Eighth Century, is well established as a principal pan-Mesoamerican deity by the mid-Ninth Century. At the same time, other Veracruz deities including Xipe Totec, Tlazalteotl, Huehueteotl, Cihuacoatl, Mictlantecuhtli, and Ehecatl are incorporated into the broader traditions of Mesoamerican religion (Ekholm 1973:42). Missionary activity creates an ideological system reinforcing economic dependencies.

We also witness the spread of Veracruz religion with the intensification of rubber ballgame and ballgame rituals. During the Terminal Classic, ballcourts and associated ballgame paraphernalia increase in number, particularly yokes, hachas, and palmas. Narrative relief carvings at El Tajin, Aparacio, Cotzumalhuapa, and Chichen Itza depict ballgame decapitation rituals and serpent iconography. Promoting this game provides a demand for rubber—a Gulf Coast commodity.

The Terminal Classic also sees the spread of Classic Veracruz style featuring interlocking scrolls woven into complex patterns. These Veracruz-associated interlaces and double outlines decorate relief panels, ballgame paraphernalia, and monumental architecture. We see the stylistic distribution in decorative elements on Gulf-related

yokes, palmas, and slate-backed mirrors found as far south as El Salvador, or in the enigmatic carved frames of otherwise vacant stelae at Cholula in Central Mexico.

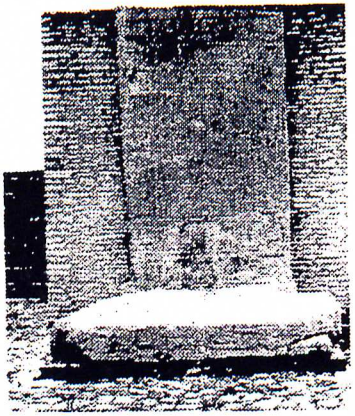


Figure 14.9 Stela framed with interlocking scrolls at Cholula.

The introduction of Veracruz style produces a detectable change in the rendering of the human figure, which becomes slightly shorter and less curvaceous when compared with Classic Maya artistic conventions. These so-called "Mexicanized" influences mark the Terminal Classic Maya style at Chichen Itza and Seibal. Accompanying the new style the Maya incorporate "foreign" costume elements, not all of which can be explained by a Veracruz presence. Butterfly pectorals, for example, have no southern Veracruz correlate; yet, serpent iconography most clearly *does*.

The popularity of fine paste molded-carved ceramics and the intrusion of square-cartouche calendric signs provide the most convincing evidence for the exceptional status, wealth, and power of Veracruz and Veracruz traders in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries. Early in Classic Maya history, the Maya develop a preference for Teotihuacan-style ceramics. During the height of Classic Maya affluence, artistic achievement manifests itself in distinctly Maya painted polychrome vases adorned with

scenes of courtly life and mythological stories. Following the Classic Fall, the Maya abandon these forms in favor of molded-carved wares. These sculpted fine paste vessels mimic the appearance of Rio Blanco wares from southern Veracruz. And, like elements of Teotihuacan symbolism centuries before, the Maya integrate Veracruz hieroglyphs and iconography as symbols of vicarious prosperity. Indeed, it is those Maya centers adopting "foreign" elements that not only survive but prosper in the wake of the Classic collapse.

For one brief shining period in the history of Mesoamerica, the people of the ancient Veracruz regained the former glory of their early Olmec ancestors. In doing so, they transformed beliefs throughout much of the known civilized world. Their gods formed the basis for much of the Postclassic pantheon, even surviving the all-consuming Mixteca-Puebla religious and economic wave following its wake beginning in the 12th Century

Throughout this study I document the signs and symbols of this extraordinary time and place. The Late Classic Veracruz semiotic system provides evidence for an emerging ancient history. The Gulf Coast, although long neglected as a principal player during the 8th through 12th Centuries, deserves reconsideration within the context of such history—that of PreConquest America.

Summary and Conclusions

Research is a self-perpetuating, life-long process. It is not linear as in the dynastic histories of the early kings of the Maya and Gulf coast lowlands; rather, like the near-hallucinogenic pages of the Borgia Group codices, each frame of reference is a jumping-off point to further mysteries, further adventures. Following the clues down a labyrinth of trails often leads us to unexpected places. Scientific method compels us to test our hypotheses, to take risks. Applying this to archaeology we often find that our ideas and assumptions undergo metamorphosis.

In Part One of this thesis—Approaching the Problem—I outlined my research objectives and methodological theory, as well as the related special considerations. My stated goals were to: 1) identify the nature of a Late Classic Veracruz script, and 2) establish the relationship, if any, between Rio Blanco and Pabellon Molded-carved ceramics

Embarking on this project I fully expected that I would find evidence for the same "foreign" hieroglyphs on Pabellon pottery somewhere in Veracruz. Apart from square-cartouche day signs, I never did. What I thought represented one script turned out to be more than one. Yet, the writing systems of the Veracruz Late Classic remain virtually ignored, the terrain I entered largely uncharted.

Through the evidence of hieroglyphs, iconography, and symbolism, together with material sources of information, I learned that three scripts coexisted in Veracruz during the last phases of the Classic Period Each script relates to a diagnostic style and iconographic program, although attributes of these discrete systems sometimes overlap The distribution of these scripts corresponds to cultural areas within Veracruz. Scholars

delineate Veracruz regional zones on such bases as ethnicity, style, ceramics, and architecture (Daneels 1997, 2001; Stark and Arnold 1997; Von Winning and Gutierrez Solana 1996; Wilkerson 1972, 1987).

Northern Veracruz is home to the much touted interlace style, or what Proskouriakoff called Classic Veracruz Style (Proskouriakoff 1958, 1971). The unique appearance of Tajin-style architecture, with its flying cornices, niches, and grecas, is another northern Veracruz phenomenon represented by an architectural stylistic corridor stretching due west from the north-central coast to Yohualichan in the northeastern section of the modern Mexican state of Puebla. This region is also the center of the ballgame cult—with El Tajin and Cantona containing over a dozen ballcourts each (Daneels 1997, Raesfeld 1990; Stark and Arnold 1997).

El Tajin relief sculptures contain a nominative form of day names—a hieroglyphic symbol sans cartouche situated over bar and dot numerals--a convention also found on Fine Relief Blackware (DuSolier 1945). In both cases—architectural and ceramic reliefs—this day name convention is unique to El Tajin (see Chapter 9). We see this style of rendering personal names carried into the international Postclassic Mixteca-Puebla style that later swept through nearly all of ancient Mesoamerica.

El Tajin toponyms (Chapter 10) offer another glyphic expression particular to that site. El Tajin artists synthesized the step-fret toponym used by the Zapotec with tree symbols associated with Teotihuacan place names (Ringle, et al.; Taube 1999; Taube 2001). These hieroglyphs symbolize altars, with sacrifices taking place above the altars representing conquered regions or polities.

El Tajin offers us some evidence of linear text, found in context with the Mound of the Building Columns (Chapter 11). For the time being, the sherds and column fragments provide insufficient data on which to base an analysis of El Tajin writing. We can only hope that further excavations bring additional Terminal Classic inscriptions to light in north-central Veracruz. This may well represent a discrete writing system, since hieroglyphic text on extant artifacts bears little resemblance to other Mesoamerican scripts (see Chapter 7).

The styles, symbols, and motifs found in the north central zone sometimes overlap with those in the Mixtequilla, Papaloapan, and Tuxtlas regions of southern Veracruz. Themes, such as ballgame decapitation, appear in both regions. Both cultural zones share similar religion expressed in a pantheon with a skeletal Death God, dancing Bird Deity, Wind God, and Feathered Serpent. Archaeologist Annick Daneels of UNAM tells us that Veracruz elites in both areas traded prestige items and symbols, while there is little artifactual evidence of interactions between members of the general populace (Daneels 1997, 2001). Hieroglyphic evidence reinforces this interpretation. Nominative hieroglyphs using southern Veracruz conventions, established during the Late Formative period, appear on El Tajin building columns in conjunction with scenes depicting long distance trade and elite interactions.

Southern Veracruz, for its part, differs from central Veracruz in several respects Barbara Stark suggests that what she calls Patarata scroll style in the southeast is distinct from the intricate interlaces found in association with El Tajin (Stark 1997). Given the overwhelming evidence of southern Veracruz as a center of long-distance trade during the Classic-Postclassic transition, the lack of type-site of any significant dimensions

serves to undermine the underlying importance of the region. Larger cities lie further north. Architectural planning also contrasts southern Veracruz culture with areas to the north. Finally ballcourts, while present in the southern sites, never appear in such vast numbers within a given location (ibid).

Hieroglyphs mirror these cultural differences. Late Formative Isthmian or Epi-Olmec day signs appear several hundred years later labeling figures on Cerro de las Mesas stelae and Rio Blanco ceramics. Their long-standing presence in the Mixtequilla suggests an underlying cultural continuity, reflecting internal regional developments. In their later incarnation, these distinctive square-cartouche enclosed signs appear individually or in pairs, their widespread dispersal (from El Tajin in the north, south to coastal El Salvador) found in conjunction with merchant iconography, rubber ballgame ritual, and the spread of Fine Paste relief-carved ceramics. Although all of these diagnostic attributes, including the day signs themselves, appear at El Tajin, there is no evidence for a sustained presence of these glyphic symbols in the El Tajin region. Cartouche-enclosed signs only occur there on one architectural column where they label foreign merchants carrying backracks. The other nominative form (lacking cartouche) is far more widespread at Tajin. In southern Veracruz, on the other hand, square cartouche day signs show up frequently, and exhibit substantial time-depth. They form part of the greater Isthmian hieroglyphic tradition.

Place name conventions also differ between the two regions. Southern Veracruz artists depict ruler elites standing above animated, anthropomorphic platforms; the maw of a predator earth monster supporting them. Taking root in Olmec iconography, these

sacred caves function as thrones or portals; the ruler placed strategically at the crossroads of the realm between the surface world and the dark recesses of the unknown.

Evidence for linear inscriptions and historic dates disappears in southern Veracruz during the Late Classic. The neighboring Maya also abandon the Long Count during this same general time period. In both Veracruz and the Maya lowlands, we see a tendency towards pictorial story telling, as ruler portraits and lengthy hieroglyphic inscriptions fall out of fashion. Does the absence of linear text in southern Veracruz suggest that the people of the Gulf lowlands abandoned the practice of "true writing" altogether? The answer is not entirely clear. During the early part of the 16th Century, the Maya were still using hieroglyphic writing in screen-fold bark paper books—although few such books come down to us from before the Spanish Conquest. On the other hand, the Maya practice of carving inscriptions in stone disappears after the Classic collapse. We have no way of knowing whether there was an analogous situation in southern Veracruz.

What is perhaps more evident is that writing in southern Veracruz went through a two-phase transformation. The first change (c. CE 700-1000) is the transition from text-based narrative to image-based narrative. The form of hieroglyphic symbols remains unchanged, although glyphic information becomes abbreviated. The second change (c. CE 1100) sees an entirely new symbolic vocabulary sweeping through Veracruz. We find this international style most clearly articulated in Mixteca-Puebla manuscript painting. The stylistic attributes are fully explored in other venues, falling beyond the scope of this study both in time period and subject matter. Relevant here is that these later changes offer few regional antecedents. In southern Veracruz, the script does not undergo transformation, it is replaced entirely. The new artistic canon provides a uniform

repertoire of signs and symbols, eclipsing both the Tajin style in the north and the outgrowth of Isthmian traditions in the south.

The third script present in Veracruz during the Late Classic is actually the hieroglyphic writing system associated with Xochicalco in Central Mexico (see Chapters 8 and 9), the subject of ongoing studies by Javier Urcid of Brandeis University and John Justeson of SUNY-Albany. We find the Xochicalco script on inscriptions from Maltrata and Piedra Labrada. Both sites seem to represent isolated pockets of outsiders, with Maltrata located in Orizaba region of southwestern Veracruz near the present state of Puebla, and Piedra Labrada northwest of Tuxpan in the Huasteca near Cerro Azul.

Distribution of scripts and related diagnostic traits lead to inevitable questions about language, ethnicity, and migrations. It is my hope that my studies of Veracruz hieroglyphs and symbolism will contribute to these discussions.

The issue of Terminal Classic writing on Pabellon Molded-carved ceramics provided a red herring in my overall objective of understanding Late ClassicVeracruz hieroglyphs (Chapter 12). After three summers tracking down Pabellon pots (often enduring layers of pointless obfuscation by government bureaucrats), I concluded that the script (apart from calendric signs) is not of Veracruz origin; rather more likely it is a regional offshoot of Maya hieroglyphic writing. This I learned not only though cross-cultural comparisons, but also by working with the actual hieroglyphs—trying to make sense of their structure. Nevertheless, certain patterns emerged from my comparisons between day signs and iconography on Veracruz Rio Blanco ceramics and Pabellon Molded-carved and related artifacts (Chapters 4-6, 9 and 12). These correspondences

convinced me that the structure of so-called "Mexican" day signs (Chapter 9) and associated iconographic traits (Chapter 13) on Terminal Classic stelae at Seibal, Ucanal, and Jimbal, stone ballgame material, and Pabellon Molded-carved ceramics, are southern Veracruz derivations.

In Chapter 2, I assert that the appearance of hieroglyphs and art aids us in understanding the nature of a script. When spoken language remains unknown, we cannot decipher writing—decoding either its syntax or sound values. We can, however, say something meaningful about the form and function of such writing.

"Non Classic" hieroglyphic texts on Pabellon Molded-carved ceramics exhibit all the properties of logo-syllabic writing. These include linear text, substitutions, and affixes (see Chapter 12) Their structural and componential elements bear strong similarity to Classic Maya hieroglyphs. I therefore conclude that the script encodes spoken language syntactically related to the language of Classic Maya inscriptions.

I catalogue, define, and track glyphic and iconographic traits in Chapters 7-13, and in Chapter 14 suggest some of the social history and processes accompanying the spread of symbols and ideas. Documenting the properties and distribution of Fine Paste molded, relief-carved ceramics proved enormously helpful in understanding the diffusion of technologies and semiotic systems. In much of the ceramic literature, relief carved wares become lost, tangled in the confusion of Fine Orange Sabloff (Sabloff 1973, Sabloff and Willey 1967; Stuart 1993) and others suggest foreign—possibly Gulf Coast--origins for Pabellon ceramics, hieroglyphs, and iconography Yet these studies fail to

show the correspondences between ceramic industries and symbols within the respective regions.

Spread of ceramic technologies connected with Fine Paste relief-carved pottery has recently received the attentions of Susan Sherman, Christophe Helmke, and Evelyn Rattray. Sherman is a graduate student at Harvard University. A ceramics specialist, she works extensively in southern Veracruz on with what she confidently calls "Pabellon" wares. Helmke, a graduate student at the Institute of Archaeology, University of London, concentrations his attentions on Imitation Pabellon Molded-carved wares from the Maya region. Rattray's work focuses on the ceramics of Teotihuacan (Rattray 1974), including ceramics from Gulf Coast barrios present at that ancient city. This is critical research, since some of the earliest relief carved bowls come out of that site. A future synthesis of these studies will inevitably re-shape our understandings of relief-carved, fine paste wares, adding yet another chapter to the information contained herein.

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